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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB901

State and Local Government- Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica

My name is Ioana Stoica and I have been a Maryland resident for most of the time since immigrating to the United States at the age of 11. I have resided in District 21 for the past 4 years. This testimony is in support of SB901.

My father defected from the brutal dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania. Aided by a coalition of faith organizations, he escaped while at a conference in East Germany and was smuggled into West Germany. An engineer in our home country of Romania, in West Germany he worked for less than minimum wage in manual labor jobs as an undocumented immigrant. Determined to make it to the United States, he spent all his spare time filling out forms and waiting in line for an appointment at the US Embassy. My father lived in fear every day that he would be rounded up and sent back to face prison or worse. Finally, he received an interview with the embassy; when asked why he wanted to come to the United States, my father replied that he would give anything to live in a place that afforded so many freedoms, including the freedom to not be afraid. As he tells the story, the interviewer then and there stamped his forms and congratulated him on a favorable interview and probable asylum. Months later, he was on a plane to Maryland, and, a couple years after that, communism fell and my sister, mother and I were able to join him.

It has been my family's greatest privilege to be granted asylum and to be welcomed with open arms in our progressive, diverse state. However, our privilege now does not extend to so many others who are facing just as dire, and in many cases, much worse, situations. People today escaping civil war, drought and other natural hardships, extreme poverty, gang violence, and those simply seeking freedom to pursue happiness and better conditions for their children, deserve the same consideration. They, too, deserve the freedom to not be afraid.

Nobody in this country, a country that prides itself as standing as a beacon of liberty, should live in fear that they will be caged, jailed, separated from their families, or deported, simply for working hard and making a future for their children. SB901 will ensure that Maryland law enforcement cannot simply terrorize residents by stopping people to ask about their immigration status, and detaining people based on this status, or by cooperating with ICE without a warrant. Our great state of Maryland should do all it can to diminish the effect of the

federal government's brutal, inhumane immigration policies; the very least we can do is not cooperate with ICE, and certainly, we can help by not doing their job for them.

The Jewish holiday of Passover begins soon after the end of the Maryland legislative session this year. During Passover, we tell stories of passage and focus on teachings about welcoming the stranger, a role we all have played in the past. Every single one of us, unless we are of indigenous American descent, was once an immigrant, and it was only unearned privilege related to circumstances at the time, that allowed us present citizenship status. It would thus be unconscionable for Maryland to turn our current undocumented residents over to ICE or to harass citizens to determine their immigration status, especially as these individuals contribute productively to our economy and community.

Please, stand up for the fundamental principle of liberty and dignity for all people, regardless of the privileges or lack thereof that they were born into, and support this important legislation. I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB901.