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Rabbi Sonya Starr

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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: Rabbi Sonya Starr on behalf of Columbia Jewish Congregation and Howard County Board of Rabbis

My name is Rabbi Sonya Starr and I live in District 13. I submit this testimony representing myself, Columbia Jewish Congregation and Howard County Board of Rabbis. I am the granddaughter of four US immigrants from Eastern Europe and the mother of two naturalized US citizens from Guatemala. We want to encourage you to support SB901.

My family's history demonstrates why we need legislation that protects immigrants in Maryland. My grandmother Sarah hired a fake uncle for the day who sponsored her into this country. My grandfather William's parents lied, telling the customs officers that he was sick instead of deaf and mute so that he could get the education impossible to receive in the old country. The only thing that separates Sarah and William from the undocumented residents of Maryland today is 100 years. Our undocumented neighbors have fled extreme poverty, relentless violence, horrific persecution and unavailable medical care in order to give their children and grandchildren a better life. They are tax paying, hardworking contributing members of our community. They are the ancestors of tomorrow's lawyers, doctors, clergy, voters, and state delegates.

My children who were born in Guatemala are immigrants and people of color. They are constantly profiled by police officers when they walk down the street or get stopped for a routine traffic violation. They have been counseled by immigration lawyers to always carry a copy of their naturalization papers with them in case they are traveling in a county that works with ICE. They are American citizens who are profiled and harassed.

I am commanded as a Jew and as a human being to remember the lessons of the past. It says in the Hebrew Bible no less than 36 times to protect the stranger because we too were once strangers in the land of Egypt. I am to remember what happened to the shiploads of people America turned back during the Holocaust who died at sea or were killed by the Nazis. I am to remember that there are parts of this world that are so violent and terrifying, or so poor and hungry that we here in Maryland must provide refuge. I am to remember so that I will do everything in my power to support, and legitimize their pathway to citizenship.

The Talmud is one of the oldest sacred Jewish books. It is written in the Talmud "Whoever saves one life saves the whole world." In the name of the people that I am representing, I am asking you to save many worlds by codifying our ethics into law. We must protect not only those lucky enough to immigrate 100 or 200 years ago, or those who by accident of birth have white privilege, but all people. **I urge a favorable report on SB901.** Thank you for your time and attention.