

The Great City of Mount Rainier  
Office of Councilmember Celina Benitez  
February 26, 202



Senator Will Smith, Chair  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 901 (“SB 901”) – State and Local Government - Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement**

Dear Chairman and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Celina Benitez, Councilmember for the Great City of Mount Rainier. A city that is enriched by its cultural diversity and A Hub for the Arts. A city that is empowered by its diversity and Proud to make all of our residents feel welcome and part of our community.

It is our responsibility to create and strengthen the relationship between the community and elected officials. However, it’s difficult to advance those goals, when a significant population in my community is scared to engage the police. The ability to pass SB901 will send a strong message, it would declare that Maryland will NOT support the targeting of immigrants, Muslims, and others and that we embraced and stand up for all of Maryland residents and their rights.

The national discussion on immigration has real implications at the local level that only exacerbates existing local challenges that will affect us even our ability to have an accurate count in the 2020 Census. In the last two census millions of dollars were not allocated to Maryland and we cannot afford to once again be denied our fair share of our funds to build programs in the short and long term. To build trust with our communities start here and has to start now.

As a way to counter the fear within our immigrant community, The City of Mount Rainier adopted a welcoming community ordinance that includes many of the critical provisions in SB 901. Some of those critical provisions are codifying that local law-enforcement does not engage in civil immigration enforcement, law-enforcement officers are not interested in your immigration status, and clearly states that immigration enforcement is solely a federal responsibility. This has created an increase in Civic collaboration in Mount Rainier. Equally important, our local ordinance sent a strong message to our immigrant community that our police department is focused on ensuring public safety for all residents, regardless immigration status or any other status. Our Officers are here to serve and protect and that is how you build a successful community Policing.

Lastly, SB 901 will not prohibit police from fulfilling our duties, in the contrary SB 901 will be a tool in our community policing toolbox. I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 901.

Sincerely,

*Celina Benitez*

Celina Benitez, Councilmember City of Mount Rainier, Maryland  
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