



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Shared voices for liberal religious values in Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB0403 - Immigration Enforcement - Public Schools, Hospitals, and Courthouses - Policies

To: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Tammy Spengler, Co-Chair, Immigration Task Force, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Date: February 11, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB0403 which requires the Attorney General to develop guidelines for schools, hospitals and courthouses to establish policies that limit civil immigration enforcement on their premises and thus making these facilities safe and accessible to all. As Unitarians we believe in the worth and dignity of all people, we believe in creating inclusive community, and we believe that families belong together. This bill supports these basic humanitarian rights and I hope that you will support it.

In Howard County I participated on the Board of Education's policy committee on immigration. Our committee consisted of educators, administrators, immigration attorneys, parents and community members. Members heard from parents who were afraid to send their children to school for fear that ICE would arrest them when they dropped their children off or that their children would be taken by ICE. National news of children coming home to empty houses magnified these fears. Undocumented parents were also afraid to attend school events or volunteer at the school. We also heard about the health impact on families who were living in this constant fear. Parents were afraid to take their children to the doctor if they were sick and children tried hard not to tell their parents if they were ill, knowing that this would make their parents more anxious. Many parents refused to sign up their children to receive the free school lunches their children would be eligible for because they were afraid their immigration applications would be negatively affected for receiving food for their children. Passage of HB0403 will help to alleviate some of that fear.

In addition to helping families feel safe to send their children to school, I also want to ensure that immigrants feel safe to get the medical and legal help they need. I am a mental health provider and I coordinated a domestic violence program at Sinai Hospital for several years. During that time, I served many clients whose immigration status was used by their partner as a way to control or abuse them. The abusive partner would threaten to report them to ICE if they reported the abuse to the police or filed charges. Victims were also afraid to seek the medical help they desperately needed. Now, in addition to this threat by their partners, immigrants have the additional barrier of being afraid that they will be reported to ICE if they seek medical or legal help. They are not sure whom they can trust or where they are safe. ICE's increased presence at courthouses and detention of domestic violence victims after seeing protective orders, has made

immigrants more afraid than ever to seek help. This bill would let them know that they are safe to seek medical treatment or legal help if they need it.

My Unitarian Universalist faith calls me affirm justice, equity and compassion in human relations. I want my neighbors to be safe to send their children to school or to seek medical or legal help if they need it. This bill would reduce the fear that is prevalent among our immigrant neighbors and would create a healthier society. Please pass HB0403 and let our immigrant communities know that we stand with them.

Thank you for your consideration.

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