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**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House of Delegates
Judicial Committee
Immigration Enforcement – Public Schools, Hospitals, and Courthouses – Policies
(HB 403)**

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SUPPORT

Maryland PTA is the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and businesses as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For 105 years, our mission has been to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of House Bill 403, Immigration Enforcement – Public Schools, Hospitals, and Courthouses – Policies ("HB 403"). The bill would require the Maryland Attorney General, in consultation with appropriate stakeholders, to develop guidelines to assist public schools, hospitals, and courthouses to draft policies that limit civil immigration enforcement activities on their premises to ensure these facilities remain safe and accessible to all, regardless of immigration status. It also would ensure that public schools, hospitals, and courthouses have the ability to establish and publish policies that limit immigration enforcement on their premises to the fullest extent possible consistent with Federal and State law based on the guidelines developed by the Attorney General.

In 2017, and in response to harsher policies and rhetoric surrounding immigration and an attendant rise in fear in immigrant families and communities, National PTA updated its 1996 position statement on protecting the rights of undocumented children and their families to read, among other things that, "The protection and preservation of public school attendance, student learning and well-being is of paramount import to the future and success of our country," and that to live up to this creed, "Schools should be defined in statute as 'sensitive locations,' and Immigration and ICE officers and agents are to refrain from enforcement actions against students in schools including preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities, and other institutions of learning, such as vocational and trade schools."

In tandem with the position statement of National PTA, there have also been recent studies and reporting on increased absenteeism and decreased academic achievement among students who are undocumented or who have undocumented parents. The increased absenteeism can lead to immigrant children being deprived of the constitutional right to receive a public education, which was upheld in the 1986 Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe*. According to UNESCO's most recent Global Education Monitoring Report, school attendance among children from immigrant families is negatively impacted in the United States because of an uptick in immigration enforcement in immigrant communities and a correlated

uptick in fear of detainment and deportation among undocumented immigrants and their families.¹ The report recommends ensuring school grounds are safe for undocumented immigrants and free from fear of deportation. Additionally, in a study of more than 730 public schools conducted by the UCLA Civil Rights Project, 54.74% of teachers and school administrators reported observing increased absenteeism when students had concerns about immigration enforcement affecting them or their families.² Some jurisdictions have experienced precipitous spikes in absenteeism at times when fear of immigration enforcement was high,³ and 60% of teachers and administrators reported observing a downturn in academic achievement among students affected by immigration enforcement.⁴

It goes without saying that immigrant children should have access to medical treatment free from the fear of deportation. When people in America are forced to live in fear because of their immigration status, their health and the health of our nation suffers. The threat of increased federal immigration enforcement has raised concerns among immigrant families, some of whom may decide to forego necessary medical services out of fear that they could be putting themselves and their family members at risk. It is in the public's interest to ensure all people receive timely medical care. Prohibiting immigration enforcement in hospitals will preserve an immigrant's inalienable right to life, and preserve public health.

Maryland PTA supports both the constitutional right of immigrant children and those with undocumented parents to receive a public education and medical care, and the classification and treatment of schools and hospitals as sensitive locations free of threat of deportation. Further, given that there is strong evidence that student attendance and academic achievement suffer, as well as student health, because of fear of immigration enforcement in their communities, Maryland PTA supports HB 403. We believe protecting the rights of children of immigrant families to feel safe and welcomed, to receive a quality public education, and medical care is integral to the mission of the PTA.

It is for these reasons that Maryland PTA urges a favorable report on House Bill 403.

Respectfully Submitted,



Dr. Edna Harvin Battle
President

¹ Clark, Helen. *Global Education Monitoring Report, 2019: Migration, Displacement and Education: Building Bridges, Not Walls*. UNESCO, 2018, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265866>.

² Gándara, Patricia and Jongyeon (Joy) Ee. *U.S. Immigration Enforcement Policy and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning in the Nation's Schools*. UCLA Civil Rights Project, February 28, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/immigration-immigrant-students/u.s.-immigration-enforcement-policy-and-its-impact-on-teaching-and-learning-in-the-nations-schools/>.

³ Blitzer, Jonathan. After an Immigrant Raid, a City's Students Vanish. *The New Yorker*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/after-an-immigration-raid-a-citys-students-vanish>.

⁴ See footnote 2.