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TESTIMONY ON: SB478 - Correctional Services - Immigration Detention - Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings Committee

HEARING DATE: February 10,2021

POSITION: FAVORABLE

BILL CONTACT: Senator William Smith

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 2500 members who live in a wide range of communities in Montgomery and Frederick Counties, from Bethesda near the DC line north to Frederick and from Poolesville east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep all the members of our communities healthy and safe in a clean environment, uplift all residents of our communities, and promote equity. DTMG strongly supports SB0375 because increasing public safety for all Maryland residents is a primary focus for our organization.

Many Marylanders are not aware of our role in warehousing immigrants. The federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) already has three immigration detention agreements with local county jails that allow counties to profit from the incarceration of detained immigrants. Counties like Howard, Frederick and Worcester bring in hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars each year by renting their bed space to ICE - incentivizing the incarceration of immigrants.

In Howard County's Jessup detention center, immigrants are being held for **alleged violations of civil not criminal law**. According to a recent Department of Homeland Security report, the Howard County Detention Center (HCDC) is **violating human decency** and ICE's own policies. A 2014 report came to similar conclusions. Despite these damning findings, HCDC authorities insist that practices like **strip-searches** and other documented atrocious treatment will continue unabated. The COVID-19 crisis is only heightening concerns about the safety of detainees.

Even worse, ICE is now contemplating yet another detention center, capable of incarcerating up to 800 people, in Maryland. This past April, ICE advertised on a federal contracts forum for one or more potential locations in Maryland. A location near Baltimore was considered initially, and ore recently, locations have been scouted in Queen Anne's County.

While civil rights advocates and activists have been working hard to ensure that new facilities don't get built in our state, legislators have a responsibility through legislative action to keep private, for profit immigration detention out of Maryland.

What does the Dignity Not Detention Act do?

SB0478 will

- Ban any new contracts or renewals of existing contracts with detention facilities operated wholly (or in part by) private corporations.
- Ensure that the public is adequately informed in any plans for a new private detention facility to take place.
- Require local entities that already have an existing immigration detention agreement (IGSAs) to terminate the contract by June 2021.

ICE has a well-documented history of inhumane treatment, inadequate medical care, and unsafe conditions that have put the lives of detained immigrants at risk for decades. ICE has failed to meet the demands of the pandemic, with the result that ICE detainees are 13X more likely to contract COVID than members of the general public. Urgent action is needed to protect the safety and the lives of immigrants in detention before it's too late.

SB0478, The Dignity Not Detention Act, is one step toward ending mass incarceration and dismantling the private prison industry in Maryland. **This bill will keep ICE from detaining immigrants in Maryland - and ensure that no local governments or corporations are profiting off of the incarceration and suffering of immigrants.**

DTMG strongly supports the enactment of SB0478 because it protects vulnerable members of our community. If a state has the right to punish those in our jurisdiction, it also has an obligation to protect them!

Therefore, DTMG strongly urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB478.

Respectfully submitted,

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