

IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 317, THE UNIVERSAL REPRESENTATION ACT

Thank you for the opportunity to explain my stand in support of passage of the Universal Representation Act.

I reside in Columbia, MD. I am a member of the Executive Committee of Howard County's Coalition for Immigrant Justice. I am a retired corporate attorney.

It is an ingrained principle and constitutionally assured right that a person has the right to legal representation in front of a court. But, in civil immigration cases, the immigrants have to cover their own legal expense. For a detained immigrant, i.e. with no income, the "right to representation" is a hollow expression.

It is thus with appreciation that I read Senator Hettleman's draft of SB317. In my opinion, SB317 is carefully balanced legislation: it extends legal representation to detainees subject to removal from the U.S. detained in Maryland or Maryland residents held outside Maryland. The quality and cost of the program are controlled by the State of Maryland, in particular by the Maryland Attorney General, who supervises the program. The overall cost is expected to be modest as only some 400 yearly representations are anticipated.

The importance of this legislation is overwhelming, thus the cost-benefit ratio is very favorable. In particular, a study of 1.2 million deportation cases revealed, *inter alia*, that only 14% of detained immigrants secured representation; immigrants of different nationalities differ greatly in their ability to secure representation, with immigrants from Mexico doing poorest in this respect; representation makes a huge difference, with the scope of defense strategies and success rates 2-4 fold higher for immigrants represented by attorneys. www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/access-counsel-immigration-court.

In the interest of justice and as a service to Maryland residents, the program outlined in SB317 has my support.

Thank you for considering SB317.

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