

SB 317 – SUPPORT
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Office of the Attorney General – Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 27, 2021

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Alton Lincoln Swaby and I am a resident of Hyattsville, Maryland. As a former client of Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition. I am writing to express my support for SB 317: Office of the Attorney General – Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator.

I was born in Jamaica. I have lived in Maryland for the last five years. I came to the United States because I met and married a United States citizen. We moved to the United States together to start our life. She never applied for my residency, as she said she would. We ultimately separated. It was not a good relationship for me.

Detention was a very depressing experience for me. I had never been in a situation like that before. I had never been locked up and was feeling hopeless. To be honest, I didn't know anything. I did not have anything in my country, I did not have anyone. I did not have family or anyone here to help me coordinate outside of the detention center.

I found out about CAIR Coalition from other people who were being detained in the detention center. No one was working for me. It meant the world to me to have a lawyer. My lawyer is very special to me because fought for me. I no longer felt alone. When I met my attorney, she gave me hope. She took care of everything. I did not even know what VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) cancellation was, - the law that helped me get protection – but my attorney walked me through everything.

I could not imagine doing this on my own. I didn't even have my phone with me. There was no way for me to do everything that I needed for my case. The attorney won my case and now I am building my own life. I attend a Christian church, where I am very involved. I also work as a cook in an Indian restaurant.

This bill is really important. Because a lot of times people do not have access to their family and to people who will help them. People in detention feel so hopeless and lost. They are the people who need help the most. Most of the people find themselves in detention because they didn't know what options they have. Some people had never been detained before. ICE picks us up and treats us like animals. That is wrong. Having an attorney helps us fight for our rights.

I urge a favorable report on SB 317.