



**faith. love. liberation.
fe. amor. Liberación.**

Testimony in support of SB0317

Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator

To: Hon. William Smith, Jr., Chair, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Jerry Kickenson and Martha Wells, Congregation Action Network

Date: January 27, 2021

We are writing in **support of Senate Bill 0317**, Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator, on behalf of the Congregation Action Network. The Congregation Action Network is a network of faith communities in Washington, DC, and the Maryland and Virginia suburbs acting in solidarity to end detention, deportation, profiling, and criminalization of immigrants and demanding and upholding justice, dignity, safety, and family unity. With over 75 congregations and a thousand members throughout the capital area, including over 25 congregations with thousands of members in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, we live our faith in advocacy for our immigrant neighbors.

As people of faith committed to ending the detention and deportation of immigrants, we adhere to the sacred texts of most major faiths that call for welcoming the stranger and treating each other with love, dignity, respect, and compassion. We believe in liberation and that immigrant families should be united and free - never incarcerated, and never feeling unsafe in their own communities.

SB0317 would empower the Office of the Public Defender to coordinate legal representation for Maryland residents facing detention or deportation in immigration court. Having legal counsel has been shown to be the critical difference in whether an immigrant gets to be free pending adjudication of his or her asylum request, and whether an immigrant is deported or is allowed to live freely and safely with his or her family in America. Keeping families whole is a fundamental tenet of our faith traditions.

We strongly urge you to reach a favorable report for SB0317. It will provide true due process to all residents of Maryland facing loss of their liberty and home. It is the right and moral thing to do.

Respectfully yours,

Jerry Kickenson

Cluster Leader, Congregation Action Network (Montgomery County)

Martha Wells

Cluster Leader, Congregation Action Network (Prince George's County)