

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 Jose Aldin Maldonado and I am a resident of Baltimore, 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 Honduras and I have lived in Maryland for three years. I have three children ages 4, 9, and 11. All three were born in Honduras, and fled with me. I am married and live with my wife. I work as an electrician.

I came to the United States in November of 2016. My family was being threatened by the gangs. They murdered my father and threatened me. Our lives were in danger and the police weren't doing anything to protect us, so we fled to the United States.

I was detained by ICE in December of 2019. I thought I had applied for asylum a year before, because I had paid an attorney a lot of money to do so, but they only took my money and did not apply. When I was detained by ICE, it was really difficult. I was constantly afraid that I was going to be deported. The first time I presented myself in court, I was by myself and did not know what was going on. It was very hard to be apart from my children; they are the most important thing in the world to me. I was so scared. I did not speak English. I did not know what was happening.

I found the number to CAIR Coalition in the detention center and called. I did not understand anything until my new lawyer began explaining everything to me. She gave me hope. My attorney handled all the paperwork. She knew everything we needed to do. Truthfully, she worked so hard for me. She worked with my family and walked us through everything. The lawyer that I had been struggling to pay before hadn't done anything to help me. But this attorney was free and she was working very hard for me. She was able to help me win asylum. Without a lawyer, I would have been deported and would have been separated from my family. I believe that I would have been killed.

People in these positions need lawyers who will actually help them and who won't just take advantage of them. They handle everything that we could not do on our own. My family was struggling so much already because I could not work to support them. Having free representation removed a burden from us. For many families, it is the same.

With the help of God, and an attorney, people can overcome some of their most difficult moments. Our countries have so much violence and pain. We need lawyers to defend us and save our lives.

I urge a favorable report on SB 317.