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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB88/HB304
State and Local Government- Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Laura Atwood, and I live in Silver Spring, D20. I am testifying in support of SB88/HB304, State and Local Government - Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement. While I'm active in local organizations, I am testifying as an individual.

I'm committed, personally and professionally, to seeing and honoring the humanity of every person I come into contact with. I'm a home physical therapist and travel to 5-6 homebound patients in my county each workday.

I've done this work throughout Montgomery County since 2011 and have seen distrust and wariness toward even healthcare providers increase noticeably in the past few years. I'm white, and before I enter many patients' homes, I need to deliberately build trust and signal that I'm with them, that I'll give the same care to them that I would to their neighbor or to my own parent--and of course do the hard work with myself and my organization to make sure this is in fact true.

If they had good reason to think that I might turn them over to immigration or other authorities, how much less trust would there be? And how could people who really need home healthcare get it if they, and/or household members, were too afraid?

The "sensitive locations" part of the Trust Act hits especially close to home. A few months ago, someone asked me, related to ICE: "My friend wants to know: If my friend can't breathe, is it safe to go to the hospital?" Can you even imagine if this were you or a loved one?!

And I scratch my head: I think it's an understatement to say that policing as an institution has trust/trustworthiness issues. So how does it serve policing to collaborate with the demonstrably cruel, reckless, and lawless agency we know as ICE? From horrific Covid response, to family separation, to deception during raids (e.g., on church grounds in Glenmont!), to continued transfers during a pandemic (nationwide including DHS bringing contagious detainees to Virginia so DHS could join BLM suppression), to violent response to detainee activism and hunger strikes (Virginia and nationwide), to excessive strip searches (Howard County), to deportations that seed Covid outbreaks in vulnerable countries--ICE has no place in Maryland police's circle of collaboration. (Please let me know if you'd like but can't locate information resources for these examples.)

It's also worth noting that ICE detention and deportation are neither inevitable nor necessary. ICE didn't even exist before 2003. And before the 1980s and 1990s, an era when prisons in general were expanding, immigration detention was uncommon.

Finally, as injustices in the criminal justice system are looked at and addressed, it seems wrong that Maryland would essentially condone ICE acting as a shadow system--without transparency and accountability, and without constitutional protections given to people who are being deprived of liberty and are in danger of being deported to their deaths. (Again, please let me know if you'd like information sources.) Anyone detained by ICE would, even in the eyes of the flawed criminal justice system, otherwise be free to go and live among loved ones in the community. The human-rights shortcuts that ICE takes are unacceptable and should not be supported.

For the sake of community trust, ability of everyone to receive needed service, and basic human dignity:

I urge you to support SB88/HB304.