

To Senators Smith, Waldstreicher, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am a resident of District 21 and a long time Maryland resident. As a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County and as a Christian who is called to love the immigrant and refugee, I feel I must speak up on their behalf. I am testifying **in support of Senate bill number SB317**, which provides legal representation to detained Maryland residents facing deportation.

Legal representation is the difference between winning and losing in immigration court. In Baltimore Immigration Court, those with legal representation were four times more likely to win their case. Currently, low-income people in immigration court are not provided lawyers to represent them, even though they face deportation, permanent family separation, detention, and persecution in their country of origin. In fact, 81% of detained immigrants in Maryland have no representation at any point in their case.

Immigration laws are complex and difficult to understand, especially if English is not your first language. Justice in these cases should not be determined by your ability to hire a lawyer. This is why we need Universal Representation — so that, regardless of background or income, ALL people receive due process under the law.

When members of our immigrant community are deported without representation, they often leave behind spouses, children, and jobs. Take for example Eddy, who was pulled over for a driving violation, then detained in the Howard County Detention Center. Eddy was subsequently transferred to detention centers in Jessup, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and finally deported, leaving behind his wife and three-year-old daughter.

During this entire process, Eddy had no legal representation. Not only is this unjust, it is also incredibly disruptive to families and communities who are already vulnerable. Universal Representation would guarantee people like Eddy receive a fair trial, and increase the likelihood of them remaining with their families.

SB317 would ameliorate that by ensuring the over 500 Maryland resident immigrants in detention are connected to counsel in deportation hearings in cases heard in Maryland and stipends and assistance in obtaining counsel in cases heard out-of-state. Programs like these are already in place in Prince George's County and Baltimore City and they make a difference.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of SB317.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda Girdner  
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