

SB 317 – SUPPORT
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Office of the Attorney General – Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
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Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

Hello everyone. my name is Carlos Alonzo it is a pleasure to be here for this cause. 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 am from originally from Honduras but grew up in the States. I moved with my grandparents to Maryland at the age of nine (9) in 1986 to have a better life. I came from a poor family. I think like any kid that age, I struggled with fitting in and being accepted. I was laughed at because of the clothes that I wore, my hair, and my accent. Those experiences ultimately led me to selling drugs and joining a group of kids that did the same – which led me to committing a grave crime. I had a public defender that represented me in that case. I did not know then, but I was poorly advised. I had little communication with my lawyer. I had all the trust in them, and my ignorance in the law did not help me either. At the age of seventeen (17) I was sentenced to thirty-five (35) years to life. I spent the next years trying to better myself in every way possible, while at the same time filing post-conviction remedies on my own. Having no assistance forced me to read more about the law, yet this still was not enough to help me.

In total I did twenty-five (25) years in prison. In 2017, a new law was passed that allowed those that had committed a crime before the age of 18 to be resentenced. I was contacted the same public defender services that represented me in 1995. The only thing was that I was blessed to have a great team representing me this time around. They were with me every step.... on April 3, 2020 I was granted relief by the Superior Court of Washington DC. Because of the nature of the case and my immigration status, I had an ICE detainer pending and was then placed under their custody for deportation. I was referred to the CAIR Coalition, where I met the great Ms. Laura De Las Casas. I say great because her representation helped me decide one of the biggest decisions that I had to make in my life. I had to choose to fight my immigration case or choose to be deported away from my loved ones here in the States.

Ms. De Las Casas educated me in all ways by sending me cases and making sure that I understood all the information with phone calls. Having the necessary information, afforded me the opportunity to choose deportation – as I came to the realization that there was no winning this case. I had done too much time and the only thing that I wanted/needed was freedom. Ms. De Las Casas understood me, even though she advised me to think this through with time, I was sure of the choice that I made. Ms. De Las Casas told me that she would be there every step of the way until I got home. She kept her promise, even kept my family informed along the way. She did all she could to expedite my procedures. I remember that the last time I spoke to her while still in custody was 20 minutes before I boarded my flight for deportation.

I share these few words freely and gladly to allow you exposure to my experience, that there is indeed a great need to be represented. The laws are many, most too complex to be understood even when knowing how to read English well enough. I hope that what I have shared is enough to help the next man or woman that goes through these processes and that they are as well represented as I was, with empathy

and patience that is needed from them - knowing that at that moment we are facing the greatest moment of all! We need bills like these to be passed nationwide, but we can start here.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to share my experience! I urge a favorable report on SB 317.