

January 27, 2021

Stew Remer

Rockville MD 20854

sremer@verizon.net / (301) 233-1996



THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB317

Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Stew Remer, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Stew Remer. I am a 48-year resident of Montgomery County most recently living in Rockville, District 17. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUJ), I am submitting this testimony in support of SB317, Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator. JUJ organizes more than 5,500 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

Leviticus 19:33 – 34, says: When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The sojourners who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. In this legislative session, now is the time to follow the words of Leviticus and provide universal legal representation for Maryland residents facing immigration issues and prioritize funding to ensure effective implementation of this legislation. Families who came to Maryland for a better life do not deserve to be torn apart by the federal government's cruel and discriminatory policies. Deportation is one of the harshest consequences an individual can face under U.S. law, yet most Maryland immigrants do not have the right to appointed counsel and many cannot afford an attorney. This legislation will help provide critical legal representation to residents who are detained and facing deportation in Maryland and have no one to defend their rights.

I currently volunteer for the Capital Area Immigration Rights Coalition which strives to ensure equal justice for all immigrant men, women, and children at risk of detention and deportation in the DC metropolitan area and beyond. In my role as a hotline volunteer, I have spoken with many detainees desperately seeking help in understanding the Immigration Court and deportation process so they can make better informed decisions about their cases but who cannot afford an attorney to represent them.

This legislation will provide access to counsel and help to ensure due process and just treatment for immigrants. It will reduce the high taxpayer costs associated with prolonged detention, and by streamlining the legal process, a representation program lessens the need for foster care and other programs that serve the U.S. citizen children whose parents are detained or deported. Legal representation would also lead to fewer families losing their sources of income and prevent more employers from shouldering the costs of turnover and hiring new employees after losing their workforce to deportation.

According to the American Immigration Council, immigrant-led households in Maryland paid an estimated \$4.1 billion in state and local taxes in 2018 and possessed \$27.6 billion in spending power. Undocumented immigrants in Maryland comprised 6 percent of the state's workforce in 2016 and paid an estimated \$242.3 million in state and local taxes in 2018. Universal Representation would facilitate undocumented immigrants receiving legal status which in turn would significantly raise their tax contributions.

While the federal government continues to rip apart families and detain immigrants, Maryland must stand up to protect our families and make sure no one has to fight deportation alone. Up until now, most immigrants in Maryland faced deportation and permanent separation from their families, without a lawyer by their side.

Thanks to Senator Hettleman's leadership, our state is one step closer to providing universal representation for detainees, and guaranteeing due process and fairness. **We respectfully urge you to follow the words of Leviticus and issue a favorable report on SB317.** We hope to see this legislation become a reality.