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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB478
Correctional Services – Immigration Detention – Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)

My name is Ioana Stoica and I have been a Maryland resident for most of the time since immigrating to the United States at the age of 11. I have resided in District 21 for the past 5 years. I am writing as a core leader of the Bend the Arc - Prince George's County Minyan, as a member of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), Oseh Shalom Synagogue, and as an ally of CASA. This testimony is in support of SB478.

The Torah repeatedly commands us to love and welcome refugees as our neighbors. Leviticus 19:34 states: "The strangers 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." Here in the United States, the vast majority of us were once strangers to this land. The Jewish tradition teaches that it is our responsibility to welcome these strangers; as Jews, we understand this plight as we have been persecuted for our religious beliefs and have had to flee to save our lives throughout our history.

I write not only as a Jew who feels called to support immigrants in our midst by my faith, but as a child of a political defector from formerly communist Romania, who was able to immigrate to this country after my father was granted political asylum. When I first learned that our progressive state cooperates with ICE to hold immigrants hostage in three facilities, and that it is looking to potentially open even more detention centers for immigrants, I was horrified. So many of ICE's policies and techniques are terrifyingly reminiscent of the kind of surveillance and state-sponsored control that my family is too familiar with, and it's unconscionable that the United States, a country that bills itself as a beacon of the free world, engages in these types of tactics.

As an immigrant and as the child of immigrants who only through luck and privilege came to be citizens of this country, I fully support others who have not been as fortunate as my family, in seeking to engage productively with American society, and in living free from the fear of being terrorized by the state and from the fear of being ripped away from their families and being held indefinitely in detention. For this reason, I support the Dignity Not Detention Act, which abolishes all contracts between our state of Maryland and ICE, and prevents the building of new centers in our state to be used for immigrant detention.

Nobody in this country, a country that prides itself as standing as a beacon of liberty, should live in fear that they will be caged, jailed, separated from their families, or deported, simply for working hard and making a future for their children. Please, stand up and support this important legislation. I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB478.

Ioana Stoica