

Sosima Morgan, Resident of Annapolis

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB317

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

January 27, 2021

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sosima Morgan and I am writing today to ask for your support on SB317, a bill that would help so many immigrant families that do not have money for a lawyer.

I am from Mexico, but I have been living in the United States, here in Annapolis for 17 years. I live here with my son, Willians and my granddaughter Stefanie. My granddaughter is 10 years old and attends Windsor Farm Elementary School. She is the joy of my life. But when she was born, I had to fight so that my son, her father, could be present in her life.

Ten years ago, my son was detained by ICE. He was picked up by ICE in a raid at his workplace, along with five other men who are all good and hardworking people. Many of those men also had families here in Maryland. During the raid, they arrested my son, and to this day, I do not understand why because my son has never committed a crime, or even had a traffic violation.

My son suffered for a month in detention. Once he was detained, I searched everywhere to find a lawyer. It took me ten days to find a reliable lawyer. The attorney collected \$6000 to represent him and we also had to pay a \$5000 bail. In total, I had to pay around \$11,000. I fought to be able to pay this lawyer. I had to borrow money from my family and friends to be able to pay the lawyer.

After speaking with the lawyer, I learned that the officers were accusing my son of being part of a gang to justify his arrest. My son had to explain that his tattoos had no gang connection. His tattoos were images of a rosary, praying hands and his grandmother's name. They racially profiled my son because he was Latino and had tattoos. This almost destroyed my family.

Despite the financial hardship it was for me and my family, my son was able to get released from the detention center because he had legal representation.

After he was released from detention, his case went on for two years that resulted in several more court visits and more expenses. Immigrants in detention should have a right to defense. Families with fewer economic resources should have access to a public immigration lawyer because they deserve justice too.

I ask that the committee support SB317. Thank you for reading my story.