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Favorable Testimony for SB0317 Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator

To: Chair Senator William Smith and other esteemed members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Dianne Seiffert
Date: January 22, 2021

My name is Dianne Seiffert, a 50 -year resident and homeowner in Montgomery County. I submit this testimony in support of SB0317 as the only acceptable moral and ethical position for Maryland State legislators to take to ensure fair and uniform legal representation for Maryland residents facing detention or deportation in immigration court.

Having legal counsel has been shown to make the critical difference of whether an immigrant receives due process in their immigration case proceedings, determining whether an immigrant is deported or allowed to live freely and safely in America. Most persons facing immigrant court have neither their own funds for counsel, nor the language skills or understanding of complicated US immigration law to successfully represent themselves. The result is that without counsel most are detained or deported, even when their cases merit relief. This is tragic through no fault of their own in an unjust federal system. Statistically in Maryland, immigrants facing immigration court are 4-5 times more likely to be granted relief if they have counsel (Source: Vera Institute of Justice; Capital Area Immigrants Rights Coalition). Keeping families whole is fundamental to economic and social well-being, and thus strong, stable communities. Even though the new Biden administration has announced its intent for policies for a more just federal immigrant court system, that would take time to consider in Congress and then to implement if passed. Maryland needs to lead to assure its immigrant residents have right to counsel in immigration court.

I ask members to pass SB0317 out of Committee, and that Committee members individually and publicly declare your support to all Senate colleagues, and work to encourage all Senators to join you in passage by the full Senate.

Respectively submitted,

Dianne Seiffert
Montgomery County resident
Chair, Immigrant Justice Ministry
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church
Member, Congregation Action Network