

SB-317: SUPPORT

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District 16

SB317 SUPPORT

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

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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

As an Interfaith Minister and more than 50-year resident of the State of Maryland in District 16, I strongly support SB317. Because the bill would require the Attorney General to coordinate legal representation for Maryland residents facing detention and deportation in Immigration Court, I urge you to consider its passage on moral and humanitarian grounds.

Our immigrant neighbors face crushing fears and threats. They FEAR separation from their families, most of which were established while residing, working and paying taxes in our communities. They are vital assets to our State and many are the so-called essential workers who have kept us safe, nourished, healthy and well cared for during this pandemic crisis. They have been unduly THREATENED with deportation proceedings in recent times due to the harsh and cruel enforcement mandates of the prior federal administration. They deserve access to counsel, due process under the law, regardless of income, background or merit of case. Studies have shown that individuals without representation are less likely to obtain due process.

I minister to our immigrant neighbors and see the pain they have suffered for far too long. Let us protect their family unity by providing strong counsel so that justice may be served in their cases. They are our neighbors, friends, family, and beloveds. Let all of us in this State assure that they are treated with compassion and understanding. Maryland can lead the way with this bill. Other jurisdictions have adopted such supportive programs for their residents with great

success. See <https://www.vera.org/the-human-impact-of-universal-representation> for a look at how we can lead with love.

I urge a favorable report on SB317.

With hope for peace and justice through love,
Rev. Charlene Belsom Zellmer, MDiv