

SB 317 – SUPPORT
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Office of the Attorney General – Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 27, 2021

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Ana de Jesús Sáenz and I am a resident of Hyattsville, Maryland. As a former client of Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition, I am writing to express my support for SB 317: Office of the Attorney General – Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator.

I have lived here in Prince George's County, Maryland for approximately 15 years. During all this time, I have worked here. All this time that I have worked, I have paid taxes annually. Also, six of my grandchildren attend Maryland schools. Since I came to the country, I have worked and I will continue working until I can no longer.

My experience in detention was very scary and stressful. Arriving where you're considered a criminal, starting with the way you're locked up, with chains from hands to feet. And also, as I saw, humble people who are being treated as "criminals." This is motivated by the feeling of being part of a policy that dehumanizes us as migrants. While I was in there, I came to understand that for each of us in immigration detention, we have to confront an immigration system that considers us "violent" both inside and out of the detention center. This is something I hadn't realized until I was there. It had a big impact on me. I didn't know anything about this side of the system. I had never been in an immigration court.

My lawyer Lucia, from the organization Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition, helped me with everything, to be able to stop my deportation that had been ordered since 2006 and to be able to fight for my case from here inside, without even seeing me in person. She was a huge help in my case and I'm happy to have been released. I am so thankful for the organization for that.

This is very important especially for immigrants like me who don't have a lawyer because lawyers help us fulfill our rights of being heard in immigration court, because not all of us have the funds to hire and pay for a private lawyer. If it weren't for the organizations fighting for people in detention centers, many people would be deported. For example, in my case, thanks to them, I continue to fight for my rights in this country and I have a work permit. I give thanks to each of you from the bottom of my heart, especially my lawyer Lucia who works on my case.

Please help legal organizations they can continue to support the immigrant community here in Maryland. I urge a favorable report on SB 317.