



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

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

As a Maryland resident, long-time organizer with Sanctuary DMV, and third-year law student working in the immigration legal space, I wholeheartedly express my support on behalf of Sanctuary DMV for this legislation. We at Sanctuary DMV believe firmly that all immigrants, particularly those detained, have a right to zealous legal representation. Without it, far too many Maryland residents are torn away from their families and communities. We have a responsibility to stand alongside our immigrant neighbors, and this legislation is an important step in the right direction.

Sanctuary DMV is an all-volunteer collective dedicated to working in solidarity with immigrant communities in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. Amongst other activities, we accompany individuals to immigration appointments carrying a risk of detention or deportation, support families affected by ICE enforcement in the region, and advocate for state and local policies that enhance rights and resources for immigrant communities. Through this work, we have supported several individuals fighting their cases from immigration detention, and we have seen how zealous legal representation can make or break a case.

One example stands out. Last year, a Maryland resident we accompanied to an ICE check-in was abruptly detained at the ICE office and told he was going to be summarily deported. Time being of the essence, we immediately contacted Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition (CAIR Coalition) to find legal representation for the man, while also reaching out to local Congressmembers and ICE officials to request that ICE delay his deportation pending pursuit of legal relief. Thanks to a joint effort between CAIR Coalition, Sanctuary DMV, and other volunteers, we quickly secured pro bono legal representation for the man, who was able to win release from detention, return to his wife and children, and continue fighting his case from outside detention.

Yet, unfortunately, most people in his situation would not have fared as well. Maryland residents who, like this man, do not happen to live in the Maryland jurisdictions with universal representation models are often forced to fight their cases alone. 81% of detained immigrants in Maryland have no legal representation. For each rare success story, Sanctuary DMV has seen several other individuals spend months or even years in immigration detention without representation. These long periods of detention without representation are particularly concerning during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused outbreaks and deaths in detention centers across the DMV region. We have also seen several individuals deported, permanently torn away from their family members who rely on them.

With so much focus in recent years on the effects of Trump's egregious immigration policies on the U.S.-Mexico border, we sometimes forget that family separation occurs every day, right here in Maryland and across the United States. Every time an individual is detained or deported, families are separated. Universal representation is a way that Maryland can fight back against detention and deportation and keep families together. We must act now to expand universal representation for detained immigrants state-wide.

Sanctuary DMV urges a favorable report on SB 317.