

February 10, 2021

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB478/HB16
Correctional Services-Immigration Detention-Prohibition
(Dignity Not Detention Act)

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

FROM: Rebecca Goldfinger

My name is Rebecca Goldfinger. I live in Silver Spring in District 20. I am here testifying in support of SB478/HB16, Correctional Services-Immigration Detention-Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act).

As a Jewish person, I am commanded to live by the Biblical words of Exodus 22:21: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Like so many other Jews in this country, I am descended from brave people who left Eastern Europe to escape religious persecution and poverty. One of my maternal great-grandmothers left the Ukraine because of pogroms there and arrived in the United States at the age of seventeen, alone, speaking no English. Fortunately, she went on to meet my great-grandfather, and they were lucky enough to achieve the American Dream of a better life for their children and their children's children. But I am haunted by this thought: what if my forebears had not been so lucky? What if, instead, they had been apprehended by ICE and detained for months, weeks, or years in a detention center?

Reading stories about CASA members who have been picked up by ICE, detained, and even deported both breaks my heart and makes me wonder: what if this had happened to my great-or great-great-grandparents? I might well not be here today. And I cannot begin to fathom the disruption to detainees' lives. Many of them have already fled oppression in their countries of origin and arrived in the United States, thinking that they were going to be able to have a better life in this country, as my own ancestors did. These hopes are dashed when they are detained or even deported.

Because my own family were once strangers here, I empathize with people whose journeys from other places are a bit more recent than mine. I feel very strongly that we must not detain

or deport immigrants, but rather allow them to establish themselves in American society, as my own family did.

For this reason, I support the Dignity Not Detention Act, which would prohibit the State or any local jurisdiction from entering into agreements facilitating immigration-related detention by private entities, ensure that the public is adequately informed of and given opportunity to testify about any plans for a new private detention facility's construction, and require governmental entities to terminate existing contracts for the detention of immigration-related detainees not later than October 1, 2022.

I believe that as a country, we must stop wronging the immigrants in our midst, and I believe that this legislation is a step in the right direction. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB478/HB16.** Thank you very much for your consideration.