

SB 317 – SUPPORT  
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**SB 317 – SUPPORT**

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 a Louisa da-Ockiya. I am a Maryland resident and US citizen. As the mother of 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 in the state of Maryland since 2003, roughly sixteen years now. For the past fourteen years I have worked as a healthcare provider with Capital Homecare, Inc. My children and I are a tax-paying family.

When I immigrated in 2003, I brought three of my children with me. I navigated the difficult and complicated immigration system alone over many years and was finally able to get my children where they needed to be. But my son did not acquire the status he needed. He continued to live with me, graduated from high school with honors, and started his own business. He had a daughter that he loves so much.

In 2018 immigration authorities took my son and locked him up in a county jail while they tried to deport him. It was not necessary to lock him up, he is not a dangerous man. But that's what they do. This incarceration brought me a lot, a *lot* of worry and anxiety. My son helped me pay rent and without him it was very difficult. He also helped me with my health needs.

We could not afford to hire a lawyer to represent him. Especially for those of us in this community who lack resources, this system punishes us because in a time of desperation we can be financially exploited by lawyers who charge more than you can imagine and whose quality of work we cannot trust. This jail system places a large financial burden on families, and it is immigrants and members of the Black community who are the ones victimized the most.

But the Prince George County Universal Representation program gave us peace of mind. When we met with CAIR Coalition and saw that they were genuinely working for our best interest and outcomes we trusted that things would work out OK. When I learned the program was funded by the County, it changed my perspective and made me thankful that this County is one of the first in the U.S. to have our backs like this.

Many immigrants are low-income people until their circumstances improve. Any help that Prince George's County gives us will be reinvested in the community. My family is an example of that. Because of the Prince George's County universal representation program, my son will have a chance to stay here, go to work, go back to being a father, and go back to contributing taxes. Hopefully he will be re-opening his old local business.

I hope that many more people can experience the help that my son did and continues to receive. I urge a favorable report on SB 317.