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Baltimore, Maryland
District 8

Testimony in Support of Bill SB0317, Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator

To: Chair Smith and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Arielle Juberg

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice in Baltimore and Casa de Maryland's Ally Network.

I am in strong support of SB0317, Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator. This bill is about access to justice through counsel, and as representatives in our government, I sincerely hope this issue matters to you.

I have lived in several countries where I did not speak the predominant language and had little understanding of the judicial system. Whenever I needed to complete an administrative task, such as obtaining a visa, I worked with a native speaker who knew the judicial system inside and out. Immigrants who are currently detained throughout Maryland may be very much like me – they may not be proficient in English or familiar with the American legal system and its proceedings. However, unlike my case, the vast majority of detained immigrants in this state had no legal representation at any point in their case. This situation is unacceptable.

The current situation is particularly egregious considering the consequences of these legal proceedings. These men and women may lose their liberty through imprisonment, be deported and separated from their loved ones, and risk violence, harassment, and persecution in their destination countries.

We have evidence that universal representation provides necessary services to vulnerable detained immigrants in Maryland, including asylum seekers, longtime legal residents, and people brought into the United States as children. Across the country, thirty-nine percent (39%) of clients of the SAFE Network (which includes Baltimore residents) entered the US as children. Furthermore, twenty-five percent (25%) of clients were possible survivors of human trafficking, intimate partner violence, or victims of crime. This was even higher for female clients.¹

To every member of the Judicial Proceedings committee who has publicly stated that they oppose human trafficking and seek to support victims of crime – this is your opportunity to stand behind your words. The current system in Maryland perpetuates systemic injustices in our legal system. I respectfully urge a favorable report for Bill SB0317 so that this injustice can be corrected.

¹ The Vera Institute. SAFE Network Announces Expansion and Celebrates Successes at One Year.
<https://www.vera.org/newsroom/safe-network-announces-expansion-and-celebrates-successes-at-one-year-a-dozen-communities-united-to-provide-public-defense-to-immigrants-facing-deportation>