



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

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly throughout the entire Greater Washington area to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents, support our Jewish day schools and community centers, and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the entire Jewish community.

Deuteronomy 23:16-17 says, *“You shall not deliver unto his master an enslaved person that has escaped from his master unto you. He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your gates that seems good to him; you shall not mistreat him.”* Beginning with that unyielding Biblical injunction and continuing throughout our people’s history, Jewish law and tradition have embraced the stranger and demanded that we help those in need.

The JCRC has a long tradition of endorsing policy measures that provide support to immigrant communities. In immigration court, legal representation often makes the difference between whether someone is allowed to remain safely in this country or is deported. Senate Bill 317 establishes that an individual who is detained in immigration detention in Maryland or in another state and is a Maryland resident has a right to legal representation in certain immigration proceedings and establishes the Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator in the Office of the Attorney General to manage services and resources in order to provide all covered individuals with access to legal representation.

According to a study by the American Immigration Council (AIC), only 37 percent of all immigrants go to court with lawyers by their side. Not surprisingly, individuals with counsel are more likely to pursue relief from deportation and win their cases. Detained immigrants are 11 times more likely to pursue relief when they have legal counsel and are twice as likely to obtain relief than detained immigrants without counsel. The JCRC

recognizes the importance of legal representation as it dramatically increases the chance that an individual achieves a successful outcome in their immigration case. Providing a right to counsel is a proven means of keeping families and communities together and avoiding the resulting social, economic and public health costs of deportation. For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on SB 317.