

TESTIMONY ON SB88/HB304, “THE MARYLAND TRUST ACT”
FOR THE JANUARY 27 HEARING OF THE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE
POSITION: FAVORABLE

SUBMITTED BY

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I strongly support the Maryland Trust Act as introduced by Chairman Smith. This bill is a necessity on both practical and moral grounds.

It is a practical necessity because effective law enforcement requires the support of the community it serves, and that support depends on trust—trust that the police and other law enforcement officers are there to protect the community, not to serve other agendas that harm the community. In the case of Maryland’s undocumented immigrants, that trust will be lacking as long as people live in fear that contact with the police will lead to deportation of their friends, their family members, or themselves. I understand that empirical studies have confirmed this common-sense concern, showing that cities with policies like those in the Maryland Trust Act, prohibiting state and local law enforcement officers from acting as surrogate agents for federal immigration policies, have lower crime rates and encourage more immigrants to report crimes they observe. In short, enactment of the Maryland Trust Act will improve public safety.

For an extreme example of the consequences of the loss of trust in governmental authority, one need look no further than last week’s riot and attempted insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Of course, the cases are very different: the loss of trust fueling the riot resulted from FALSE beliefs, generated by self-serving politicians, manipulative right-wing media, and deranged conspiracy-mongers—and it was enabled by an exaggerated sense of entitlement among too many White Americans. In contrast, immigrants who don’t trust the police are influenced by legitimate, well-grounded fears that cooperating could have devastating consequences. But the general point stands: restoring faith and trust in governmental authority is a critical challenge in the U.S. today.

The act is also a necessity on moral grounds. Undocumented immigrants are not citizens, but they are human beings and entitled to the same fundamental respect and dignity as everyone else. The arbitrary and capricious—not to mention heart-breaking—operation of federal immigration policy is well known. People who have fled to the United States because of violence, corruption, and poverty in their native countries, who in many cases have raised families here and have been productive and law-abiding neighbors for years if not decades, should not be subject to arrest because they are dropping a child off at school or visiting a spouse in the hospital!

The fact that policies like those in the Trust Act are already working in Maryland’s five largest jurisdictions—Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George’s counties and Baltimore City—and another 13 local jurisdictions is good evidence that they should be implemented state-wide.

Thank you for your attention.