

HB 0750 – SUPPORT
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Office of the Attorney General – Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator
Maryland House of Delegates Judiciary Committee
March 3, 2021

Dear Chair Clippinger and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Philip L. Sussler and I volunteer with Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition. I am a resident of Silver Spring, Montgomery County, Maryland. As a community member working with Maryland residents in immigration detention, I am writing to express my support for HB 0750: Office of the Attorney General – Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator.

I have been volunteering with CAIR Coalition for approximately three years by providing translation services during live interviews or intake of clients and translating documents into or from English in assisting CAIR Coalition attorneys with their work in representing immigrants in detention. I am a semi-retired attorney, wanting to give back to my community through my volunteer services in partial recompense for the wonderful opportunities afforded me throughout my life as a citizen. I am fluent in Spanish, Portuguese and French and have been able to use this skill to provide language translation services to assist the CAIR Coalition's attorneys. I have also volunteered with other public and civic organizations in the DMV area to teach civic classes to immigrants pursuing naturalization in the District of Columbia and literacy skills in Montgomery County, through the County's Literacy Council and in the District of Columbia, through the DC public schools.

Working with CAIR Coalition prior to the pandemic, I conducted client intake interviews and sat in and translated for interviews directed by the Coalition's attorneys conducted with their clients held in immigration detention centers at Farmville in Virginia and Snow Hill in Worcester County, Maryland, subject to pending ICE deportation proceedings. Through this translating work, I had direct experience in understanding the very difficult experience that can be faced by persons in immigration detention, and the extreme disruption to their families and community which results from detention and deportation. I generally recall during the numerous separate interviews in which I participated, the unfolding of a common, recurring narrative. The person being interviewed typically had fled his native country facing extreme duress and violence many years ago, had moved to and was resident in Maryland since immigrating, now had here a family, a job and was meeting his financial and family obligations, including paying a mortgage and car-payments; but had been picked up by the local police and transferred to ICE custody, due to a traffic or other non-violent violation of the law, placed in the detention center and was now subject to deportation, because lacking in documentation of immigration status and unable to access on his own private legal representation because of a lack of funds. The persons being interviewed had difficulties in fully comprehending English (hence my presence as a translator) and did not understand the legal procedures they were undergoing. As can be imagined, they would often exhibit extreme stress due to their detention in prison-like conditions and express great worry about their situation, the fate of their families and their inability, due to the detention and risk of deportation, to fulfill their obligations to their family, their creditors and their community.

It was apparent to me that the legal advice and representation provided by the lawyers working for CAIR Coalition or other similarly deployed organizations gave the persons in detention with whom I dealt directly during the interviews, an anchor, essential for them to understand their immigration status and exercise their rights in the immigration process. The access to legal representation also allowed the

attorneys to identify whether the detained persons needed medical or psychological help and to seek to arrange this assistance. These seem to me to be basic arrangements that should be afforded persons caught up in these circumstances.

As I understand, because of a lack of resources and the large numbers of persons held in detention, the important work that CAIR Coalition and other similar organizations provide is only narrowly available. The proposed bill would increase the resources to support this vital work.

Accordingly, I urge a favorable report on HB 0750.