

Deborah Rosenfelt
University Park, MD 20707
dsr@umd.edu

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB750

Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator

My name is Deborah Rosenfelt. I was born in Baltimore, and have been a resident of University Park in District 22 for 30 years. I am Professor Emerita at the University of Maryland, and I am writing today as a member of Bend the Arc, Prince George's County Moral Minyan, and of Sanctuary DMV. I also am active in YANA (You Are Not Alone), the political action group of Fabrangon Cheder Community.

One of the cornerstone principles of the progressive Jewish tradition to which I belong is "Tikkun Olam," a mandate to repair the world. I take that commitment seriously. All my grandparents came to this country seeking not only a better life economically, but the freedoms they felt that American guaranteed. My father, a doctor, was too old to be drafted during World War II, but he wanted to serve anyway and volunteered. As a captain, he headed a field hospital just behind the front lines, and then after VE Day, was placed in charge of a liberated labor camp. He was not a well man when he returned, suffering from what we would now call Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. I learned to be very proud of my father's bravery and his commitment to fighting against the Nazis for freedom. My mother and I used to memorize poems while making beds together, and one of the first I learned was Emma Lazarus's poem on the base of the Statue of Liberty, "Send these, your homeless, tempest-tossed to me; I lift my lamp beside the golden door." Freedom and liberty for my family included a sense that the right to live in safety should not be denied to those who are poor and helpless because they can't afford legal representation.

I know personally some undocumented individuals, and I know of many others, who are living productive lives, contributing economically and culturally to my community. Some work in our homes, and are seeking paths to citizenship. Many work in the currently-devastated culinary industry in Prince George's County, and have been instrumental in managing and staffing small family-owned restaurants—as I know from working on a food pipeline in the county designed both to support restaurants and secure meals for hungry families.

The right to legal counsel in negotiating our complex immigration laws must be guaranteed to those who are seeking refuge, or amnesty, or pathways to citizenship. If we are a nation of laws, then we need to make the exercise of those laws equitable and

fair, and to guarantee access to a hearing in court with adequate representation to those who need it, especially those facing deportation, or internment in punitive insitutions of detainment, including children.

HB750 ensures the more just and humane treatment of human beings who have believed in Emma Lazarus's invitation. I urge a favorable report on this bill.

Respectfully,

Deborah Rosenfelt