



The Maryland Chapter of Doctors for America submits this testimony in strong support of the passage of HB 16 – ‘Dignity not Detention.’ We are part of Doctors for America, a national non-partisan nonprofit organization of over 21,000 physicians, medical students, trainees, advocates, and other health care professionals from all specialties committed to advocating for our patients. Those members, including the over 800 members in Maryland, support policies that protect all our patients regardless of citizenship status, allowing them to feel safe in accessing the health care that they need, and oppose inhumane detention of migrants and refugees attempting to enter the United States.

As physicians and medical students, we know all too well the physical danger and psychological trauma that immigration detention poses to the people who are detained. These negative externalities extend to their families and communities as well. When immigrants are detained either in government prisons or in for-profit detention facilities, their physical and psychological health suffers. There are well-documented cases of untreated infection, withholding of necessary medications for diseases both acute and chronic, a lack of prenatal care for women who are pregnant, even reports of rampant physical and sexual assault. The trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder rates in migrants as a result of their detention and separation often surpass the effects of the conditions that may have driven them to migrate in the first place. Multiple suicides have been documented or suspected in these facilities, nationwide and in Maryland.

As physicians and those in training, we also know that suffering of these detained migrants has ripple effects on their families and communities, creating secondary trauma. Families lose the social and financial support of a parent, brother, sister, or spouse. Children are subjected to the loss of a parent or older sibling, resulting depression and anxiety about what their family member is experiencing, an inability to sleep, loss of productivity at work or school, and depressed immune defenses leading to increased disease susceptibility.

Many of my colleagues in DFA have been for years on the front lines caring for those being held in immigration-related detention. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic upon us, this issue has taken on even more urgency. Detention facilities in general are high-risk areas for spread of a virus as infectious as SARS-CoV2 among detainees and staff alike as well as worsening illness and death rates much higher than that of the general population. Many of our members are part of a national network of health care providers who review medical records and write medical affidavits on behalf of detained immigrants. The care that they receive, including that related to COVID-19 infection, is often quite substandard. COVID symptoms go unacknowledged and untreated. To put it simply: these illnesses and deaths are wholly preventable.

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As those sworn to care for those in our communities who are sick and in need of care, Dignity not Detention stands out as a clear way our state, our society, can 'Do No Harm' and care for all of those in our midst. We urge the passage of Dignity not Detention so that families can stay together and be healthy together.

Yours sincerely,

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