



March 1, 2021

Re: Testimony in Support of the Maryland Trust Act

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC writes to express our strong support for the Maryland Trust Act (SB 88/HB304) and urge you to pass the bill out of committee. Advancing Justice | AAJC works to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans through advocacy, public policy, public education, and litigation. Founded in 1991, Advancing Justice | AAJC is one of the nation's leading experts on civil rights issues of importance to the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community including immigration and immigrants' rights, census, hate incidents, language access, technology, and telecommunications, and voting rights.

Immigration is an important issue to Asian Americans. 92% of Asian Americans are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Maryland is home to over 415,000 Asian Americans making up 7% of the population. Around 266,000 of them are immigrants and around 39% of Maryland's Asian American population are limited English proficient. Overall, 15 percent of Marylanders are immigrants, and nearly 275,000 Marylanders are undocumented.¹ The issues of legalization and immigration enforcement is often thought of only as a Latino issue. In fact, there are around 35,000 undocumented Asian immigrants living in Maryland.

Advancing Justice | AAJC supports legalization of the 11 million undocumented immigrants and does not support mass deportations. Nationally, an estimated 5 million undocumented people—are doing jobs deemed *essential* to the nation's critical infrastructure according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and International Security Agency's (DHS CISA) latest guidance. But regardless of where one stands on the issue of legalization, there is ample reason to disentangle local law enforcement from federal immigration enforcement.

Communities are safer when there is trust and cooperation between local law enforcement and residents. SB 88 would help restore community trust in our law enforcement and help our communities live without fear of racial or religious profiling and discrimination. In the last year we have seen a huge spike in hate incidents against Asian Americans likely due to former-

¹ All data in this testimony related to Asian Americans residing in Maryland can be found at aapidata.com.

President Trump's statements regarding the COVID-Pandemic.² After Trump was elected hate incidents against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim shot up as well. This legislation is important to limit government employees from making statements or inquiries related to a persons race or religion.

Jurisdictions with community trust policies (also known as sanctuary policies) are safer than jurisdictions without them.³ Evidence demonstrates that victims and witnesses of crimes will not come forward if they are concerned about immigration enforcement against themselves or a household member.⁴ [Advocates for survivors of domestic violence](#) overwhelmingly agree that law enforcement should not be entangled with immigration enforcement.⁵ It is often very hard for victims to come forward and seek assistance.

Now more than ever, it is crucial that we ensure that Maryland's law enforcement and corrections resources are deployed in the best interest of Maryland residents. We thank you for holding a hearing on this important bill and urge you to vote for it. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at mesaheb@advancingjustice-aaajc.org.

Sincerely,

Megan Essaheb
Director of Immigration Advocacy
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

² 2,120 hate incidents against Asian Americans reported during coronavirus pandemic <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/anti-asian-american-hate-incidents-up-racism/> (July 2, 2020).

³ See Wong, Tom K. *The Effects of Sanctuary Policies on Crime and the Economy* (January 26, 2017) available at <https://www.nilc.org/issues/immigration-enforcement/sanctuary-policies-effects-crime-economy/>.

⁴ A study conducted by the University of Illinois- Chicago found that increased involvement of local police and immigration enforcement eroded trust between the police and immigrants, undocumented and documented. 45% of documented immigrants were less likely to report a crime while 70% of undocumented immigrants responded similarly. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/07/sanctuary-cities-public-safety-kate-steinle-san-francisco>

⁵ See, eg. National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women's Letter to Congress in opposition to legislation that would outlaw community trust policies (July 21, 2015).