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Greg Winton
Bethesda, MD 20814

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB304/SB88
State and Local Government- Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Greg Winton

My name is Greg Winton. I live in Bethesda, in District 16. I am testifying in favor of HB304/SB88, State and Local Government- Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement, as a descendant of immigrants. My daughter's mother came to this country as a child, and I remember the stories of my immigrant ancestors, including those whose wrists bore faded tattoos.

In the Torah, there are more than fifty references to the resident stranger, exhorting us to treat them well, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt. Since that time, we Jews have been more often tolerated than accepted, our history full of forced conversions, expulsions and pogroms.

In HB304, we have an opportunity to extend our welcome to those who have come to our country in hope of a better life, whether escaping violence and oppression or simply seeking opportunities. We can debate the rights and wrongs of those who came to this country and how, but they are here now. We should welcome these strangers to our land.

In Genesis 18, G-d states his intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Their crime? That they do not welcome the stranger, but rather seek to abuse and exploit them. Abraham's nephew Lot, who not only welcomes the strangers but seeks to protect them at the expense of his own family, is saved from destruction. Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed for their sins against the strangers. The Trust Act welcomes our strangers.

Many immigrants, documented or otherwise, worry about the consequences of encounters with law enforcement and other community services, such as schools and hospitals. Chief among these fears is that their existence might be reported to ICE, leading to possible deportation. The fear people have of interacting with police has larger implications: crimes are not reported, and also illnesses are not treated, children are not educated because people generalize their fears to all government agencies.

The community suffers when people are afraid of police. Effective policing requires a community engaged with the police, reporting crimes and dangers, acting as witnesses. Functional societies need to provide support to all members: educate the young, heal the sick, protect those at risk. This bill is a good step to begin to rebuild trust between state institutions and the immigrant community.

I respectfully urge you to support HB304/SB88.