

House Bill 304**State and Local Government – Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement**

House Judiciary Committee

March 3, 2021

Favorable

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports House Bill 304, which clarifies the parameters of local participation in federal immigration enforcement efforts.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. The Esperanza Center, a program of Catholic Charities, is a comprehensive immigrant resource center located in Fells Point. Our staff and volunteers provide services and referrals, ESL education, healthcare and low-cost immigration legal services to thousands of immigrants each year. We recognize that trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement is critical to law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute crime.

House Bill 304 would prohibit law enforcement officials from detaining, searching, stopping, or arresting anyone for the purpose of investigating a suspected immigration violation or to inquire about citizenship, or country of birth of any arrestee or victim of crime. The fear of deportation often prevents victims and witnesses from contacting or cooperating with law enforcement. This provision would help law enforcement do its job by curtailing racial profiling and reinforcing trust between officers and the immigrant communities they serve.

When an individual becomes eligible for release from State or local custody, HB 304 would prohibit the government from continuing to detain the individual for the purpose of immigration enforcement, with exceptions. HB 304 also requires schools, hospitals, and courthouses to have policies that ensure their safety and accessibility to all, regardless of immigration status. Indeed, these policies will help build trust between law enforcement and communities.

Every day, the Esperanza Center sees clients in-person and virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. These clients fear that any contact with law enforcement will lead to certain deportation, and even persecution or torture in their countries of origin. Our immigration legal services program serves asylees and refugees, as well as survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and other crime in the United States. These communities must trust that they can report important information to law enforcement. Fear of law enforcement keeps lines of communication and reporting closed, while trust opens them.

We urge you to build trust between law enforcement and immigrants throughout Maryland by giving a favorable report for HB 304. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Submitted by: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy