



Many struggles, one mission.

Testimony SUPPORTING HB0023

January 24, 2021

Dear members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Abby Cocke and I am a resident of Baltimore City in District 43 and a strong supporter of HB0023. On behalf of Baltimore for Border Justice, a local advocacy and aid organization, I am submitting this testimony to urge you to SUPPORT HB0023, *Personal Information - State and Local Agencies - Restrictions on Access*.

When the state of Maryland encourages its residents to take certain actions for the public good, like getting a driver's license before getting on the road, we need to be able to trust that it is in fact safe and beneficial to do so. By opening driver's licensure to undocumented immigrants in 2013 and then sharing access to Maryland Vehicle Administration databases with U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement, the state has severely violated that trust.

Formed in the paranoid days after the 9-11 attack, when an enormous increase in government force and reach was seen as necessary, the agency has only become less accountable and more insidious in recent years. Its documented activities include warehousing people in deplorable conditions for long periods of time, denying detainees medical treatment, numerous reports of physical and sexual abuse, dozens of deaths of people in their "care", separating thousands of children from their parents, sterilizing dozens of people without their consent, making a mockery of the right to representation, and sending asylum-seekers back to situations where they face persecution and death for their beliefs or identities. Allowing ICE to access Maryland driver's license information has directly led to members of our community being picked up by this dangerous agency.

Making a bad situation even worse is the method of ICE's surveillance of our databases – facial recognition software. This methodology has been shown to produce false positives as much as 100 times more frequently for people of color than for white people, and raises the specter that people who are not even the intended targets of ICE will be swept up in their raids. Well over a thousand people who have U.S. citizenship status have been detained by ICE since the agency's inception, sometimes remaining locked up for months or even years as they attempt to prove their right to be in this country.

The truth is, there is no such thing as an "illegal" human being, and NO ONE should live in fear of being ripped from their home simply because of their inability to access our broken and byzantine system of formal immigration. The state of Maryland owes a debt to those people who have already been harmed by our shameful collaboration with ICE, and must act now to avoid deepening that debt any further.

Thank you for your attention and for doing the right thing.

Sincerely,

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