

Testimony in Support of HB 16 (SB 478) - Correctional Services – Immigration Detention – Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)

To: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 26, 2021

I am a long-time citizen of Maryland, and I thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 16, the Dignity not Detention Act. HB 16 which has many important and principled elements. It would require local entities that have an existing immigration detention agreement to terminate the contract by June 2021. It would also ban any new contracts or renewals of existing contracts with detention facilities operated wholly or in part by private corporations. Finally, it would ensure that the public is informed of any plans for a new private detention facility.

ICE has a long, documented history of providing unsafe conditions, inadequate medical care (e.g., the high rate of Covid-19 infections among detainees), and insufficient oversight of detention facilities. ICE currently has immigration detention agreements with three county jails in Howard, Frederick, and Worcester counties. Much of the funding needed to support these facilities each year is simply wasteful spending, since many of the detainees are not a threat to society and do not need to be held in detention. This money could better be spent on higher priority needs. This bill will keep ICE from detaining immigrants in Maryland and ensure that no local governments or corporations are profiting off of the incarceration and suffering of immigrants.

As a Unitarian Universalist, I believe all people should be treated with respect and are entitled to just and compassionate treatment. In general, people in immigration proceedings do not need to be detained and should not be detained. Immigration detention should only be used when clearly needed to ensure that non-citizens appear for their removal proceedings or to protect the public. In many cases immigration detention simply results in unnecessary suffering by the detained individuals and the family members from whom they are separated.

Therefore, I urge you to support prompt action on this bill in order end unnecessary suffering for detainees and their families and to protect them from further risk of Covid-19 infection.

Sincerely,
Stephen Eckstrand
Rockville, MD

Reference: Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General report:
[OIG-18-67 - ICE's Inspections and Monitoring of Detention Facilities Do Not Lead to Sustained Compliance or Systemic Improvements \(dhs.gov\)](https://www.dhs.gov/publication/oig-18-67-ice-inspections-and-monitoring-of-detention-facilities-do-not-lead-to-sustained-compliance-or-systemic-improvements)