



Many struggles, one mission.

Testimony SUPPORTING HB304

March 1, 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 HB304. On behalf of Baltimore for Border Justice, a local advocacy and aid organization, I am submitting this testimony to urge you to SUPPORT HB304, *State and Local Government - Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement*.

In Maryland, multiple counties have partnerships with U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement for the purported purpose of stopping immigration “crime”, but the truth is that the existence of ICE itself is the crime. 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, physical and sexual abuse, scores 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.

In contrast, what “crime” is it to seek a new life in a new country? So-called “illegal” immigrants have committed only paperwork violations necessitated by a byzantine and broken system; by simply coming here they have harmed no one at all. Immigration in fact has been shown time and again to make our communities stronger, more vibrant, and more prosperous. It is only xenophobia and the convenience of scapegoating the powerless that make us act as if the opposite were true. In Baltimore City, where population decline and the corresponding decline in tax revenue has made it difficult to keep the lights on, more immigration would be especially welcome!

By working with ICE to question, hold, and transfer Maryland residents into their custody, local law enforcement agencies go beyond the purview of their jobs, cause harm, and lose even more of their thin credibility. Research has shown that in places that have laws like HB304 in place, crime has gone down. This is the natural result of not forcing people into the shadows. It is past time that we ended this shameful and counter-productive collaboration.

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

Sincerely,

Abby Cocke
Co-founder, Baltimore for Border Justice
3616 Rexmere Road
Baltimore, MD 21218
Bmore4BorderJustice@gmail.com
443-631-0432