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Toby Ditz
Baltimore, MD 21217

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: Toby Ditz

My name is Toby Ditz, and I live in Baltimore in District 40. I am providing this testimony in support of HB304/SB88, State and Local Government- Participation in Federal Immigration Enforcement.

I am deeply invested in this legislation partly because we are Jewish. Our tradition teaches that it is our responsibility to welcome migrants. Jews have had to flee in order to save our lives and the lives of our children many times in our history. In the case of my family, my grandmother emigrated in the company of her mother and younger sister in 1919 from Russia, which was then torn by civil war. They fled across the closing Polish border to Amsterdam and then entered the United States through Ellis Island. Had they tried to come here only ten years later, after US immigration policy choked off the flow of immigrants from Eastern Europe (and elsewhere around the world), I doubt I would be here today. I am profoundly grateful they made it and want to make new immigrants welcome.

HB304 provides that Maryland's state and local law enforcement and government agencies may not question people about immigration status, detain, transfer, or even supply information to ICE or other federal authorities about individuals who have been charged by federal agencies only with civil violations of federal immigration law, such as overstaying a visa. This bill does not prevent cooperation when federal authorities present a judicial warrant.

It comes down to this. For every "potential" bad actor one might accidentally detain by cooperating in the enforcement of civil violations of federal immigration law, we profoundly disrupt the lives of a hundred others. That is why several of our Maryland jurisdictions, like Baltimore City, have already adopted the essentials of this bill as a matter of police department policy.

Why did they do it? They knew that the cost of cooperation was too high, not only for our immigrant neighbors, but for all of us. When enacted, HB304 will accomplish for all of Maryland's state and local government agencies what local law and policy already do in Baltimore City and several Maryland counties. It will reduce the deep in the bone fear of deportation that prevents our neighbors who are witnesses or victims of crime from cooperating with the police; it will free law enforcement resources to focus on effective local crime reduction strategies; it will lessen fear in immigrant communities to access healthcare; and it will reduce disruptions to our economy.

To enhance the prosperity and safety of all Marylanders, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB304.