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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB750

**Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings
Coordinator**

My name is Helen Beneš Kaiser and I have resided in Maryland District 22 for the past two and a half years. I am writing you as a core leader of Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, Prince George's County Minyan, and as a member of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) and of Maryland Against ICE Detention (MDAID). **I strongly urge this committee to report favorably on HB750.**

I write not only as a Jew, but as a child of a political refugee from formerly Communist Czechoslovakia and as the daughter-in-law of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. The Torah commands all Jews to love and welcome the stranger (the refugee and immigrant) as our neighbor and to treat him as one of us. My father, who had fled Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938, later sought asylum in the United States in 1948 after the Communist government took over in his country; he became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1957.

My parents-in-law fled Nazi Germany in 1938, sought asylum in the U.S. and became highly productive citizens of this country. Indeed, my husband's grandfather, who did not receive a visa in time to escape Nazi Germany, died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. I have always been grateful for the asylum granted my father and my parents-in-law. Therefore, I am committed to assuring that immigrants fleeing persecution find a safe haven in our country and state and benefit from the fundamental principle of due process to be guaranteed in HB750.

Currently in the state of Maryland, people in deportation proceedings do not have a right to government-funded counsel and often defend themselves with little knowledge of our country's laws or even of the English language. Current procedures are highly disruptive to the families of immigrants who are trying to work and contribute to a strong economy in our state. Immigrants, who have escaped violence in their homeland to ensure a better life for their families in the U.S., should enjoy the same access to universal representation as others residing and working in the state of Maryland. HB750 would not only ensure that immigrants in deportation proceedings receive state-funded representation, but would provide for outreach and education on legal representation to immigrant communities.

Universal representation programs have transformed the lives of immigrants facing deportation and their families in Prince George's County where I reside. Therefore, **I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB750** as it will provide for all individuals across Maryland legal representation and the opportunity to make the best case in their defense.

Sincerely,

Helen Beneš Kaiser