

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
RE: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB0016 - Dignity Not Detention
From: Nicole Dvorak, constituent of Delegate Courtney Watson

March 1, 2021

Greetings Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, Members of the House Judiciary Committee and Staff,

I live in Howard County, Maryland and I 100% support HB0016, also called *Dignity Not Detention*. As you are likely already aware, Howard County is one of three Counties in Maryland, along with Worcester and Frederick Counties, that currently has an agreement with ICE to detain immigrants.

That Howard County has profited off of the rampant racial profiling and well-documented, horrifying abuses of ICE for the past 25 years is unforgivable, and that many of our County's Elected officials have chosen to participate and stay silent on this injustice is shameful.

I stand with well-respected human rights organizations who, during the 2020 MGA session, supported this legislation, including CASA, Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services, ACLU of Maryland, Jews United for Justice, Congregation Action Network, and many others.

Some of the many reasons I support this legislation are as follows, and I provide more details farther below:

- 1) **No one, including Howard County, should be profiting off of human rights abuses**, which includes ICE's rampant racial profiling and other unmitigated abuse.
- 2) **Detention is not the answer**. To legitimately be close to their families, and their lawyers, those accused should actually be with their families and not thrown in a cell. The pandemic has made it even harder to reach those in detention.
- 3) Anyone detained is NOT safe in the Howard County Detention Center (HCDC). **HCDC Correctional staff are guilty of gross medical neglect**, verbal abuse, and more. [Detainees have provided their first-hand accounts of this abuse](#).
- 4) **ICE detainees are at extremely high risk of contracting COVID-19**. ICE detainees are at least 13x more likely to contract COVID than the outside population, according to [a report published by JAMA](#) (the Journal of the American Medical Association).

I look forward to the passage of HB0016, and to Dignity, and not Detention. Thank you for your time, and your service.

Kind regards,
Nicole Dvorak
Howard County, MD (Ellicott City, 21043)

More details in support of HB0016 - Dignity Not Detention:

MYTH: “But we need to keep Howard County’s contract with ICE so that immigrants can stay closer to their families, who live nearby.”

TRUTH: If people really wanted immigrants to stay closer to their families, they wouldn’t arrest and detain them to begin with, but they could easily use the option of an ankle monitor so that those accused by ICE could still be with their families. These folks might be the primary bread-winner for their families, they might be a single parent, they might provide critical support for their friends and their community. It is critical that they not be detained and thrown in a cell, where they aren’t near their families, or their lawyers, at all. During COVID, the challenges with communicating to those held in detention is even more challenging than it was before.

MYTH: “But Howard County treats its ICE detainees better than in other places. They are safer here.”

TRUTH: First-hand accounts of those detained at HCDC describe how Howard County Detention Center correctional staff are guilty of gross medical neglect, verbal abuse, and giving detainees spoiled food, at a minimum. Please read the first-hand accounts of detainees’ stories here, published by Maryland Matters on August 19, 2020: “Ex-inmates Tell Their Stories as Criticism of Ho.Co ICE Contract Intensifies,”

<https://www.marylandmatters.org/2020/08/19/ex-inmates-tell-their-stories-as-criticism-of-howard-co-ice-contract-intensifies/>

Also, as reported in a December 2020 DHS Office of Inspector General Report, Howard County Detention Center correctional staff could not prove that they fed detainees 3 meals a day, did not document the reasons as to why detainees were excessively strip-searched (including after they left the Chapel, which is located within the detention center itself), and kept a detainee in solitary confinement for nearly 60 days. The link to that report is here:

<https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2020-10/OIG-21-03-Oct20.pdf>.

The DHS report was covered by the Washington Post on October 30, 2020, here: “Immigrants held at Md. jail were excessively strip-searched, according to DHS Inspector General,”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/ice-immigrant-detainees-strip-search/2020/10/30/f5a68d00-1aa1-11eb-bb35-2dcfdab0a345_story.html

Note: Solitary confinement for even a few days is considered torture by those who have suffered directly, and thus also by any respectable humans rights organization. More info can be found here, detailed by former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Méndez: “Solitary confinement should be banned in most cases, UN expert says,”

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/10/392012-solitary-confinement-should-be-banned-most-cases-un-expert-says>

What is even more horrifying is that according to an October 2020 report in JAMA (the Journal of the American Medical Association), ICE detainees are *at least* 13x more likely to contract COVID-19 than

the outside population. Medical care in jails, prisons, etc. was already a crisis pre-COVID, but this statistic is staggering, and is in every way a public health crisis within an existing public health nightmare. Information on when ICE detainees will be vaccinated, and by whom, has been limited.

JAMA Report citation:

Erfani P, Uppal N, Lee CH, Mishori R, Peeler KR. COVID-19 Testing and Cases in Immigration Detention Centers, April-August 2020. JAMA. Published online October 29, 2020.

doi:10.1001/jama.2020.21473 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2772627>