



Olivia Bartlett, DoTheMostGood

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony on: SB0129 – Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 3, 2022

Bill Contact: Senator Shelly Hettleman

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 3000 members across all districts in Montgomery County as well as in a number of nearby jurisdictions. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep residents healthy and safe in a clean environment and which promote equity across all our diverse communities. DTMG strongly supports SB0129 because it will protect the rights of the most vulnerable in our communities.

Under our nation’s immigration laws, individuals in deportation proceedings do not have a right to government-funded counsel. Even though deportation often threatens one’s life and freedom, in immigration court, unlike in criminal court, an immigrant is denied the right to counsel when they can’t afford a lawyer. This sets immigrants up to fail, since the government trying to deport them always has counsel.

Many facing deportation have valid reasons to stay, but they can’t navigate the complex deportation system and present these claims without legal help. National data shows that immigrants with lawyers are 10.5 times more likely to win their cases than those without lawyers. 81% of detained immigrants in Maryland had no legal representation at any point in their case. Only 7% of detained, non-represented immigrants in the Baltimore Immigration Court won their case.

SB0129 will address this problem by establishing the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to provide a public defender system for immigrants in Maryland facing deportation. This program will help support the most vulnerable residents of our communities, help families stay together, and help communities thrive.

We are taught that everyone is entitled to their fair day in court. Everyone should mean everyone. Therefore, DTMG strongly supports SB0129 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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