



## **TESTIMONY FOR SB0129**

### **Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program**

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Hettleman

**Committee:** Judicial Proceedings

**Organization Submitting:** Maryland Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Cecilia Plante, co-chair

**Position:** FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0129 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Maryland is home to a large immigrant population. Immigrants contribute to our society in many ways – they often take jobs that no one wants at substandard wages; they start new businesses; and they pay taxes. However, even though our state’s population is decreasing, immigrants who have only committed a civil offence by staying in the country without getting through the immigration process, are picked up and deported at alarming rates.

When an immigrant goes to court without an attorney, they usually lose their case. National data shows that immigrants with lawyers are 10.5 times more likely to win their cases than those without lawyers, but 81% of detained immigrants in Maryland have no legal representation at any point in their case. Only 7% of detained, non-represented immigrants in the Baltimore Immigration Court won their case. This bill would create a legal representation program for detained Marylanders facing deportation. It would -

- Provide low-income Marylanders in immigration detention access to state-funded representation in their deportation proceedings, ensuring that they get due process and increasing the chances they can remain in Maryland with their families.
- Ensure that detained immigrants and their families understand their rights and are supported in a holistic way by designating community groups to conduct outreach and education with communities impacted by immigration detention (know your rights training, establishing neighborhood defense committees, receiving referrals to support services, etc.)
- Assign the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) to coordinate the funding of legal services of this program. MLSC is a legislatively created non-profit organization that has four decades of experience funding legal service

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.