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## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### Senate Bill 129

### Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

### Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 3, 2022

### SUPPORT

**Background:** Senate Bill 129 (SB129) would establish the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program to be administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation. The program would provide access to legal representation for certain individuals who are detained in the United States and are facing judicial or administrative immigration proceedings where they are subject to removal from the United States. Furthermore, the bill would create the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Special Fund to provide funding to implement this program.

**Written Comments:** Migration has been a central element of the Jewish experience since biblical times. The American Jewish Community has long advocated for fair and just immigration and refugee policies, in accordance with the biblical teaching to *welcome the stranger*. To that end, Maryland should be a welcoming state to those who want to be here. Those facing deportation are in a dire position, and are often facing the prospect of having to leave a place they have called home for many years. Deportation proceedings should be as fair of a process as possible.

Immigrants in deportation proceedings should have the exact same right to counsel as a criminal defendant. The possibility penalty of being forcibly sent to another country, which may be unsafe and foreign, is too great of a punishment to not be afforded legal representation. According to the American Immigration Council only 37 percent of all immigrants have legal representation in removal cases. Among detained immigrants, those with representation were twice as likely to obtain the immigration relief being sought. Lack of counsel means receiving less fair treatment for those facing deportation.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of HB129.

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.*

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

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