



SB 129/HB 114 – SUPPORT
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SB 129/HB 114 — SUPPORT
Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee/House Judiciary Committee
February 3, 2022

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

Maryland Against ICE Detention (MDAID) strongly supports Access to Counsel SB 129/HB 114.

MDAID is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals striving to stop immigration detention as well as systems that contribute to detention and deportation. We are made up of over 60 organizations and over 200,000 individual members and members of those organizations.

The Access to Counsel bill would require the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to coordinate legal counsel for Maryland residents facing detention or deportation in immigration court.

We know as eye witnesses, that there is no healthy amount of time for an immigrant to be detained. Some of our members have been inside of immigration detention centers and we know how hazardous these places are both to the immigrants and their families.

For this reason, it is critical that all detained immigrants be provided with free legal counsel. This will dramatically increase that chance that they are released and can be reunified with their families and loved ones.

This issue has taken on a heightened sense of urgency because of the continued pandemic. Serious illnesses and deaths due to COVID continue to rise inside the prisons and detention centers even under the Omicron variant, not only for the detained immigrant but also for the staff at these facilities. All of these deaths are preventable and would not happen were these detention centers to close down.

Many times detained immigrants receive medical care that is substandard and often are denied lifesaving medical care. As more and more detainees continue to get sick from COVID, our members hear more and more frequently how detainees coughing, burning with fever and vomiting, simply do not receive medical care at all.

In addition, family members suffer when their fathers and husbands are picked up by ICE and locked up out of reach from their family members. Families lose their wage earners and children lose their fathers. These children can no longer concentrate in school and suffer a host of psychological consequences.

The state of Maryland also suffers economically from the detention and deportation of these Maryland residents. Many of our immigrant neighbors are essential workers and contribute tremendously to our state's economy and well-being.

Finally, last year the Maryland legislature passed the Dignity not Detention bill. With that great step, fewer of our Maryland immigrants should be detained, yet those that are detained, are being sent to out of state detention. That means the Access to Counsel bill's passage is needed to continue the stand you took by passing Dignity not Detention and to ensure that immigrants get legal counsel no matter where they are in order to increase the likelihood of their being released from detention and not deported.

As our nation is now turning to address racial justice and correct past and current wrong doings, it is critical that we look at who we are locking up in ICE detention. Most, if not everyone, who gets put into Maryland ICE detention are people of color. It is time for us to provide legal counsel to Maryland residents who are in ICE detention.



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We urge the passage of Access to Counsel so that families can stay together and be healthy together.
Access to Counsel will improve the health and lives of everyone in Maryland

MDAID urges a favorable report on SB 129/HB 114.