



SEIU MARYLAND & DC STATE COUNCIL
1410 Bush Street, Suite F, Baltimore, Maryland 21230

Testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 129**
February 3, 2022
1:00 PM

Presented to: , William C. Smith, Jr., Chairman
By: Terry Cavanagh, Executive Director

SEIU Maryland & DC State Council urges a **Favorable Report to SB 129.** We commend Senators Hettleman and Waldstreicher for introducing this important legislation which, if enacted into law, will make a life-changing difference in the lives of thousands of Maryland families and our communities.

With over two million members, SEIU is the largest labor union in North America. In the Maryland, Washington, DC, and Virginia area, we represent over 50,000 workers. SEIU was founded by immigrants and has always had large numbers of immigrants.

With **Senate Bill 129** you have the instrument to extend to immigrants what most residents of our state and our country know as a basic right – the right to counsel. Through movies and television, we can all recite the rights read to those accused of a crime. Why? Because we understand that having access to legal counsel is basic. Without it, any one of us could be caught up in a system we don't understand which uses a language foreign to us.

The record shows that when Marylanders have access to legal counsel in immigration proceedings, their chance for a successful outcome dramatically increases. When that happens, there is less disruption to their lives, the lives of their family members, their employers, and the community. There is less pain. There is less fear.

So many of our members have experienced having their families ripped apart which access to legal counsel would have prevented. The fiscal note estimates this bill would have an annual cost of \$9 million. That seems like a very small cost compared to the pain, fear and disruption that Maryland residents experience every day.

We ask for a Favorable Report on SB 129. Thank you.

