

Date of Hearing: 02/03/2022

Stewart Remer

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TESTIMONY ON SB 0129 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

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

FROM: Stewart Remer

I am a resident of District 17. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 0129, Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program. First, I want to thank Senators Hettleman and Waldstreicher for introducing this bill. They clearly understand that everyone deserves legal representation, whether they face deportation, eviction, or criminal penalties. To deny legal counsel is to deny due process. This legislation will ensure that all Maryland immigrants who are detained by ICE have access to government-appointed lawyers.

As one of my volunteer activities, I staff a hotline with the Capital Area Immigration Rights Coalition. Each time I volunteer, I have the opportunity to touch base with detained immigrants who are in desperate need for legal representation, a service which CAIR Coalition tries its best to provide but isn't always able to because of limited resources. Recently the Coalition shared testimony from Marvin Miranda, a recipient of the coalition's support about his experience in immigration court. He said:

"The first time I went before the judge, I went alone. It was hard for me to express myself and talk to the judge. A month later, I qualified for free legal representation under the Baltimore Safe Cities Program. When I had my hearing, my lawyer defended me before the judge; she knew what to say and what to do. I now also understood the laws and how they applied to me. The lawyer helped me tell my story. I was able to fight for my case, and my lawyer made me feel like I wasn't alone. Without a lawyer, I know that I would have been deported. Having someone defend you in front of the judge is very important. Individuals should not be separated from their families because they do not have access to an attorney."

Your support for SB 129 is critical to ensure that the statewide Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings, a program like Baltimore Safe Cities and a similar program in

PG County, is available to all Maryland detained immigrants subject to deportation. Without such representation, undoubtedly these detainees would not know how to navigate immigration laws designed to protect them and would likely be unfairly deported.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB 129. Thank you in advance for affirmatively addressing this critical issue related to much needed immigration reform.