



SB 129/HB 114 – SUPPORT

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Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 3, 2022

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

The Maryland Chapter of Doctors for Camp Closure strongly supports Access to Counsel SB 129/HB 114. We are part of the national Doctors for Camp Closure organization which is a non-partisan organization of over 2,200 physicians and health care professionals from all specialties who oppose inhumane detention of migrants and refugees who are attempting to enter the United States of America.

We know as eye witnesses, that there is no healthy amount of time for an immigrant to be detained. We 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.

We are part of a national network where we write medical affidavits on behalf of detained immigrants. We review detention medical records and interview the detained immigrants. Many times they receive medical care that is substandard and often are denied lifesaving medical care. As more and more detainees get sick from COVID, we 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.

We urge the passage of Access to Counsel so that families can stay together and be healthy together.

D4CC urges a favorable report on SB 129/HB 114.