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TESTIMONY ON SB#SB0129 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

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

FROM: Daniel Ring

My name is Daniel Ring. I am a resident of District 19. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0129, Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program.

As a concerned educator, parent, and citizen, I believe that this bill is an essential piece of legislation to make sure that the laws of our state work for all residents. I'm a public school teacher in Maryland, and spent several years working at a high school with one of the highest immigrant populations in the state. I witnessed firsthand the heavy toll that immigration struggles set upon our young people who simply wish to learn, grow, and make a better life for themselves and their families in a new home.

As a teacher, I've witnessed too many children fall asleep in school after working late, late nights trying to make money to pay for a lawyer. Why would a high school student need a lawyer? For many of my immigrant students, they had no choice - an expensive private lawyer was their only hope of keeping themselves or their families safe from dangerous situations in their home countries. I've seen brilliant students forced to drop out in order to work to make money for legal services. I've seen hard-working, dedicated students fall asleep in the middle of a huge test due to sheer exhaustion from working late nights.

The most difficult hypocrisy was in teaching the Sixth Amendment. Many rights denied to non citizens make sense to explain as a teacher - however the right to legal representation simply did not. How could I justify to these students who saw America as a land of opportunity, safety, freedom, and justice, that just because of their immigration status, they did not merit these rights listed in our lofty Constitution? We have the ability to fix this hypocrisy now, and we must follow through.

These children deserve better from our state. Anything we can do to ease their burden would make it easier for them to do their part contributing as human beings living in our state. Wouldn't we want the same for our families and children?

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB #0129.