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**Testimony in SUPPORT of *Senate Bill 129 –
Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program*
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 3, 2022**

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly throughout the entire Greater Washington area to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents, support our Jewish day schools and community centers, and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the entire community.

The JCRC has a long tradition of endorsing policy measures that provide support to immigrant communities. Jewish law and tradition have embraced the stranger and demanded that we help those in need. In immigration court, legal representation often makes the difference between whether someone is allowed to remain safely in this country or is deported. Senate Bill 129 establishes a program - Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings – to be administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation. The purpose of the program is to provide access to legal representation for individuals detained in immigration proceedings where the individual is subject to removal from the United States. The bill also provides education and outreach to families and communities affected by immigration proceedings and detention. Additionally, the bill establishes the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Special Fund to provide funding to implement access to legal representation in immigration proceedings. It contains a mandated appropriation of \$8 million dollars.

According to a study by the American Immigration Council (AIC), only 37 percent of all immigrants go to court with lawyers by their side. Not surprisingly, individuals with counsel are more likely to pursue relief from deportation and win their cases. Detained immigrants are 11 times more likely to pursue relief when they have legal counsel and are twice as likely to obtain relief than detained immigrants without counsel. The JCRC recognizes the importance of legal representation as it dramatically increases the chance that an individual achieves a successful outcome in their immigration case. Providing a right to counsel is a proven means of keeping families and communities together and avoiding the resulting social, economic, and public health costs of deportation. For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on SB 129.