

SB 129– FAVORABLE
Marcellin N.

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"Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program"
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 3, 2022

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Marcellin and I am a resident of Laurel, Maryland. As a former client of Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition. I am writing to express my support for SB 129: "**Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program.**"

I have lived in Maryland since 1999. I came when I was 16 years old. I came in search of a better life and have worked hard to build a better life for myself and my family since then.

I have a daughter who is eight years old and a U.S. Citizen. I have attended the same Methodist church for 14 years. I have worked as a car salesman since 2009. My whole family lives in Maryland. My mother and all of my siblings are either legal residents or citizens.

I was detained by ICE in 2020. I was detained for about 8 months. I was praying and hoping every day that I would be able to get out and join my family. My first appearance in immigration court was without an attorney. Everything I was saying was being overruled by the judge because I didn't know how to phrase things correctly. I didn't understand what was happening with my case. I was confused and overwhelmed by all of the terms and the procedures. The DHS attorney was making arguments that I could barely understand.

I was detained in York, Pennsylvania. There was no money in my family for me to pay for an attorney. Thankfully an organization in the area put me in touch with CAIR Coalition. I was given free representation through the Prince George's ISLA Program.

Having a lawyer helped me a lot because when I was detained I saw a lot of people trying to figure out their cases on their own and they were being slammed by ICE and DHS and ordered deported. I saw so many people lose all their money on private attorneys who took advantage of them and they would still lose. My attorney took the time to explain what was going on to me; every step of the process. He made me feel like I was in control. He did so many things that I would not have been able to do from detention on my own. It was the best moment getting to celebrate with my attorney when we won my case.

Being an immigrant, is so difficult, you work and pay taxes, you try to raise a family and when you face possible deportation it's horrifying. You spend so much time being a part of the community to then be treated in this way. I met so many people who were losing their minds in detention, never having been incarcerated in their lives. It is very upsetting.

This bill is necessary. Not everyone can afford a lawyer and not everyone understands the law. When there is someone on your side who knows immigration law, it's a great feeling. I hope everyone gets to have that.

I urge a favorable report on SB 129.