

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by residents of District 46 who are also community leaders in Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore. SURJ is a group of community members supporting local groups working for greater racial justice in Baltimore and the State of Maryland. We are also working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland. We are testifying **in support of Senate Bill 129: Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program.**



Legal representation is often the difference between winning and losing in immigration court. In Baltimore Immigration Court, those with legal representation were four times more likely to win their case. Currently, low-income people in immigration courts are not provided lawyers, even though they face detention, deportation, permanent family separation, and persecution in their country of origin. In fact, 81% of detained immigrants in Maryland have no representation at any point in their case. Furthermore, affected families and communities are left to grapple on their own with the devastating impact of current policies.

Immigration laws are complex and difficult to understand, especially if English is not your first language. Justice in these cases should not be determined by financial ability to hire a lawyer. This is why we need guaranteed access to counsel — so that, regardless of background, income, or language of origin, ALL people receive due process under the law. In addition to guaranteeing due process, this bill ensures that affected individuals, families, and communities understand their rights and have a chance to fairly address immigration proceedings lodged against them.

When members of our immigrant community are deported without representation, they often leave behind spouses, children, and jobs. Take for example Eddy, a member of our immigrant community who was pulled over for a driving violation, then detained in the Howard County Detention Center. Eddy was subsequently transferred to detention centers in Jessup, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and finally deported, leaving behind his wife and three-year-old daughter. During this entire process, Eddy had no legal representation. Not only is this unjust, it is also incredibly disruptive to families and communities who are already vulnerable. This bill would not only guarantee that people like Eddy receive a fair trial, but it would also directly address the needs of those vulnerable families and communities.

SB 129 would ensure that the over 500 Maryland resident immigrants in detention are connected to counsel in deportation hearings in cases heard in Maryland. Programs like these are already in place in Prince George's County and Baltimore City and they make a difference. We already have infrastructure in place that would allow this program to be administered: the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, which has decades of experience coordinating legal representation and managing grant funding for civil legal services. The bill also provides for an annual appropriation to fund the program.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of SB 129. Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Keipper

Lilly Chapa

Liz Simon-Higgs

Holly Powell

Christina Pham Linhoff

John Ford

Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore