

SB 129– FAVORABLE

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"Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program"

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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

My name is Lora Adams and I volunteer with Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition. I was a resident of Prince George's County for many years and just moved to DC. As a community member working with Maryland residents in immigration detention, I am writing to express my support for SB 129: **"Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program."**

I have been volunteering with CAIR Coalition for almost three years and have been a Maryland resident for four. I have worked in refugee and immigrant advocacy for six years, and I currently work as an immigration policy consultant and educator in the DC area. I have volunteered with CAIR in many different capacities, starting with intake at regular jail visits, particularly to the facilities in Snow Hill and Howard County, and moving to more shifts on their detained immigrant hotline as the pandemic began and made in-person services more difficult. I also translate documents from Spanish to English in service of their legal clients. This type of work is so important to me, as the work I do for a living is often strategic and removed from the people it is in service of, especially in the isolation of the pandemic. CAIR Coalition provides direct services to hundreds if not thousands of people each year, and it has been a privilege to be part of their mission to provide services and demand the dignity of choice for those who are detained.

As part of my volunteer work in detention centers in Maryland, I become familiar with the multiple and compounding variables that keep immigrants in detention from a fair day in court. Many people face language barriers, which is socially isolating and a source of constant stress, as most of the documents they receive from the government and the court are in English, and everything they turn in must be translated from their native language into English. When doing intake interviews for CAIR, sometimes I am the first person that has asked them how they are, what has happened to them, and how they want to proceed. Without representation, I'm not sure they are ever asked those things. One boy I met was 15 years old and detained in a prison facility with adults. He didn't speak English, and he didn't know what was happening to him. He was afraid he would be killed if he was deported back to El Salvador, but he didn't know how to claim asylum or even what would happen at his next court date. For so many people, they have a case that would allow them to stay in the United States, keep their good jobs, and remain surrounded by their community, but they can't afford a lawyer to prove this to a court. That isn't justice, and I know we can do better.

I support this bill because everyone deserves a fair day in court. No one should have to go it alone. I urge a favorable report on SB 129.

Thank you for your time,

Lora Adams