



Indivisible: Central Maryland

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TESTIMONY FOR SB0129

Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings

Bill Sponsor: Senators Hettleman and Waldstreicher

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Organization Submitting: Indivisible Central Maryland

Person Submitting: Liz Enagonio, Lead Advocate

Position: FAVORABLE

My name is Liz Enagonio, representing both myself and Indivisible Central Maryland, a grassroots organization of constituents dedicated to protecting progressive and democratic values. **Indivisible Central Maryland strongly supports SB 129uy, Access To Counsel.**

Members of Indivisible Central Maryland volunteer with Asylum Helpers, an all-volunteer group that helps newly-arrived asylee families. One of the greatest and most challenging needs we try to meet is legal counsel for family members facing deportation hearings. We have learned that there is almost no access to pro bono legal assistance for immigration cases. There are very limited openings for “low bono” attorneys, who typically charge somewhat less for their services as a way of providing community service. The costs we have been quoted for low bono services has ranged from \$5,000 to \$9,000 per case. Since we serve about a dozen families, we often need to find and pay for several attorneys at a time. We are expert fundraisers, but our donors are small-dollar donors, whose generosity and kindness far exceed their monetary capacity. Single donations are usually \$10 - \$50, with the occasional larger gift of \$100-\$200. As well as the financial difficulty, finding immigration attorneys to take these cases is difficult at best, and impossible at times.

Many of our families are of mixed status, with members who have been granted asylum, members who were born in the United States, and members who remain undocumented as they await a Master Hearing to determine whether they can remain here. These undocumented members can be mothers, fathers, or children who arrived separately from the family member who received asylum. They have reasonable cases for being granted asylum; however, when an immigrant goes to court without an attorney, they usually lose their case. National data shows that immigrants with lawyers are 10.5 times more likely to win their cases than those without lawyers, but 81% of detained immigrants in Maryland have no legal representation at any point

in their case. Only 7% of detained, non-represented immigrants in the Baltimore Immigration Court won their case. The damage to the individual and family when their family member is deported back to what is often a life-threatening situation is horrific. SB0129 would create a legal representation program for detained Marylanders facing deportation. Having a public defender would give these individuals and their families the opportunity to remain together, operate as a strong family unit within their communities, and hopefully become American citizens who contribute so much to our nation.

For all these reasons, Indivisible Central Maryland strongly **SUPPORTS SB 129**. Thank you.

Liz Enagonio, Lead Advocate
Indivisible Central Maryland