

Dear Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am a resident of Maryland living in District 46 in Washington Village. I am an artist, small business owner, part-time instructor at the Baltimore School for the Arts, and a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 487 working on film and television shows throughout the East Coast. I am also a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ). **I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 129: Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program.**

Legal representation is 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.

As a member of a labor union, I am immensely grateful for my access to legal representation and collective bargaining. I cannot imagine facing separation from my family without legal representation. It is inhumane. Our country is built on a right to counsel. The Sixth amendment speaks to criminal cases, but given what we say our country stands for, this protection should extend to protect immigrants, who are after all crucial to who we are as a nation. I am a descendent of immigrants, now in the fourth generation from their fleeing Europe due to immense hardships.

In addition to guaranteeing due process, this bill ensures that affected individuals, families, and communities understand their rights and receive holistic support by designating community groups to conduct outreach, provide education and assign referrals to services.

When members of our immigrant community are deported without representation, they often leave behind spouses, children, and jobs. As an educator, the intense trauma my students endure when their parents are there one day then gone the next is something that I cannot begin to describe in words. We must do better for our kids. This Access to Counsel Proceedings Program would thus increase the likelihood of families and communities remaining intact.

SB 129 ensures 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.

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,

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