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TESTIMONY ON HBI 14 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Michael English

My name is Michael English. I am a resident of District 20. I am submitting this testimony in support of HBI 14, Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program.

Everyone deserves legal representation, whether they face criminal penalties, eviction, or, more relevant to this bill, potential deportation. This legislation will ensure that all Maryland immigrants who are detained by ICE have access to government-appointed lawyers. A similar bill was introduced last session, but sadly did not pass either chamber, and the need has not grown any less dire with the passage of time. Moreover, the devastating consequences of detention are heightened during a pandemic, which poses an extreme threat to immigrants in close and often inhumane conditions, and the recent Omicron wave shows that we can't take for granted that the worst is behind us. The least we can do to help people facing those conditions, not to mention a threat to staying in their communities, is to make sure they aren't fighting the battle alone in a confusing, opaque, often terrifying legal process.

Living in downtown Silver Spring, I see first hand how integral immigrants are to the community, and it helps no one to cavalierly detain people for long periods of time and potentially deport them without, at the very least, giving them the legal help they need to defend their rights and make sure whatever case they are facing sees a fair resolution. More than that, it is simply the right thing to do, even if one doesn't consider the impact it would have on the community. Whatever you think of our immigration laws, or however strictly you think they should be enforced, ask yourself, can you really defend a system that relies on people facing them without a lawyer? If not, what are we afraid of here?

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HBI 14