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Judiciary Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee  
6 Bladen Street, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**House Bill 114**

Good afternoon, Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Moon, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. I am Delegate Nicole Williams of District 22, and I will be testifying today in favor of **House Bill 114**, also known as **Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program**. For those who were here last year, you know that this bill aims to ensure that immigrants and their families do not face an insurmountable financial burden when seeking legal aid in immigration proceedings.

This legislation comes as immigrant communities continue to face a disproportionate economic impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. A recently published report from the Urban Institute found that by December 2020, adults in low-income immigrant families with green card holders or nonpermanent residents were more likely to have trouble paying for needs such as food, rent or mortgage, utilities, and medical costs. For immigrants who find themselves in this situation, the thought of taking on the expenses associated with legal counsel can seem impossible.

Without legal counsel, immigrants face an increased risk of negative outcomes from court proceedings. Data provided by the American Immigration Council in 2016 showed that only 37 percent of immigrants had acquired legal aid in court proceedings. This value was even lower for detained immigrants, with only 14 percent obtaining legal representation. Detained immigrants with representation were nearly twice as likely to have a fair outcome in court proceedings

compared to those without. For immigrants who were never detained and had representation, these chances were improved five times.

Having access to legal counsel can mean the difference between an immigrant staying with their family and being deported. It is an injustice that immigrants in Maryland at risk of deportation are highly likely to go through the court system without any form of legal representation. This legislation would create a special fund to be administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, that would provide access to legal representation for immigrants going through immigration proceedings, which differs slightly from the version of the bill proposed last session.

As a legislative body, we have the opportunity to ensure that immigrant communities avoid the social, economic, and public health costs posed by deportation. This legislation would show that Maryland is invested in keeping immigrant families together, rather than perpetuating the conditions which drive them apart.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to give a favorable report on House Bill 114.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nicole A. Williams, Esq." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Delegate Nicole A. Williams, Esq.