

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828
Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies
(Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)
Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee
March 4, 2025**

Witness: María Daniella Prieshoff, Senior Managing Attorney
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Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

The Tahirih Justice Center (Tahirih) is a non-profit legal advocacy organization that, since 1997, has been serving immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other abuses, in Maryland and other states. Since 2010, Tahirih Justice Center's Maryland office has been at the forefront of advocating for immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Daily we learn from our clients across Maryland the struggles they face in seeking protection and help as survivors of intimate partner and sexual violence. It is on their behalf that I submit this written testimony today.

For over a decade, federal policy limited Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activities in sensitive locations—such as hospitals, schools, courthouses, and places of worship—to prevent intimidation and ensure access to essential services. However, as of January 20, 2025, the revocation of these protections has left immigrant communities vulnerable to enforcement actions in spaces where they should feel safe.

This shift has already created an environment of fear and uncertainty, discouraging individuals from seeking protective orders for the abuse they suffer, pursuing education or medical care, accessing legal resources, or engaging with law enforcement. This leaves all Maryland communities' public health and safety at risk.

The recent story of our client, “Clara,” illustrates the real and imminent risks immigrant survivors in Maryland face since the revocation of sensitive location protections. Clara has resided and worked in Maryland for more than 10 years. Unfortunately, her U.S. citizen spouse subjected her to brutal and cruel violence and routinely threatened to report her to ICE if she ever reported him to police. Clara desperately petitioned Maryland state court for a protective order against her husband because she feared for her life. During the protective order hearing, Clara's spouse threatened that she would “pay” once she left the courthouse. The judge granted Clara a one-year protective order, but upon her departure from the courthouse, ICE agents confronted Clara, advising her that “someone” had reported her to them. While she had absolutely no criminal history, she was being placed in deportation proceedings.

We know of many other women like Clara who are terrified of seeking the protection entitled to them under Maryland law now that they have no protections against ICE

finding them in locations that should be places of refuge rather than areas of fear.

Our client “Dana” is an example of how the fear of ICE enforcement at sensitive locations impacts survivors. Dana fears of attending a scheduled divorce hearing at a Maryland courthouse. Despite the hearing being crucial to her divorce proceedings, Dana is weighing her attendance against the very real fear of ICE apprehension. Dana fears what may happen to her and her minor child if ICE is present at the courthouse. Even though Dana stands to gain a lot by participating in the divorce proceedings, she is willing to forgo that to protect herself and her child from encountering ICE.

Tahirih Justice Center stands with immigrant communities and supports the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act because it will:

1. **Protect Access to Essential Services:** No one should have to choose between life-saving medical care and the risk of family separation. Children deserve to attend school without fear, and individuals must be able to seek justice in our courts without the threat of detention.
2. **Enhance Public Safety:** When immigrants feel safe accessing services and reporting crimes, our entire community benefits. Fear of enforcement discourages individuals from cooperating with law enforcement, which in turn hampers public safety efforts.
3. **Strengthen Community Trust:** By establishing clear boundaries for immigration enforcement, we foster trust between immigrant communities and the institutions meant to serve them. This trust is essential for maintaining a healthy, vibrant, and cohesive society.

Tahirih Justice Center urges the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 828.