

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828/HB1006
SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and
Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee

February 24, 2025

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Committee

Yakie Palma is pleased to offer **a favorable testimony in strong support of SB 828/HB 1006 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act).**

As a teacher in Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS), I am committed to creating a safe, supportive environment for all students, especially immigrants and refugees. PGCPS provides vital resources like language support, mental health services, and family engagement to help these students thrive. Having taught resilient students from Central America and the Middle East, I see firsthand their strength and determination despite immense challenges. As the child of immigrant parents, I know the importance of a secure, welcoming school. Students cannot succeed if they do not feel safe. That is why I advocate for protecting schools as safe havens, ensuring every child can learn without fear.

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 medical care, pursuing education, accessing legal resources, or engaging with law enforcement. As a result, our communities, public health, and overall safety are at risk.

Many of my students are from immigrant and refugee families who have fled violence, war, and poverty. For them, schools are safe havens, providing stability and essential resources. Immigration enforcement in sensitive locations like schools would create fear, disrupt learning, and keep families from accessing critical support. Parents may avoid schools, hospitals, or courthouses, deepening their hardship. No child should have to choose between education and family safety. Protecting these spaces ensures students can learn and thrive without fear.

As a teacher in Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS), I serve immigrant and refugee students who rely on schools as safe havens. ICE enforcement in or near schools would create

fear, disrupt learning, and prevent families from accessing vital resources like counseling, meals, and legal support. Many of my students have fled war, violence, and poverty—school is their one place of stability. If families fear deportation, attendance will drop, mental health will suffer, and engagement will decline, directly undermining PGCPSS's mission of equitable education. Schools must remain safe spaces where all students can learn without fear.

Yakie Palma 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.

Yakie Palma **urges the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 828/HB 1006.**