



### **Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828**

SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
March 4, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) offers **a favorable testimony in strong support of SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act).**

KIND is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to providing legal representation and advocating for the rights of unaccompanied immigrant children, including many who reside in Maryland. Since opening in 2009, KIND's Baltimore office has served over 1,000 unaccompanied and separated immigrant children, helping them seek safety through immigration relief, and feel integrated, included, and welcomed into their communities.

Maryland consistently ranks among the top seven states receiving the highest number of unaccompanied children released by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to family members and caregivers in the community (3,652 children in FY 2024, and 4,950 in FY 2023).<sup>1</sup> Ensuring that all children and families can access critical services—such as schools, medical care, places of worship, and courthouses—without fear of immigration enforcement is essential to the well-being of Maryland's communities.

SB 828 would provide state agencies with guidance on the essential protections for sensitive locations, ensuring that immigrant children and families are not deterred from accessing necessary services due to the threat of immigration enforcement actions. Across the country, we have seen the harmful impact that immigration enforcement in sensitive locations has on children's education, health, and safety. Children already fleeing violence, persecution, and instability should not face further barriers to obtaining legal, educational, and medical assistance due to fear of enforcement actions at or near these essential locations.

For children who are navigating complex immigration proceedings, access to legal and social services is critical. Many of the children we serve at KIND depend on school-based support systems, community healthcare clinics, and other service providers to help them recover from trauma, integrate into their new communities, and obtain legal protections they are eligible for. If families fear that seeking assistance could lead to detention or deportation, they may forgo

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<sup>1</sup> 1 U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors By State," last accessed February 13, 2025, available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grantfunding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-state>.

essential services, leading to negative long-term outcomes for the entire community. Ensuring that people do not unnecessarily fear immigration enforcement also strengthens public safety by increasing trust in local services, including law enforcement. When families feel secure, they are more likely to call 911 in emergencies, report crimes, and cooperate with local police—helping to create safer, more resilient communities for everyone.

This legislation aligns Maryland with best practices that promote public safety and uphold the dignity of all residents, regardless of immigration status. Providing clear guidance for agencies that operate at certain sensitive locations is a best practice modeled by similar legislation in California and Washington State. KIND has offices in both of those states, and we have seen firsthand how legislation which provides clear guidance and instruction to state agencies has positively impacted the children we serve. These protections enable children to access the services they need to integrate and thrive in their new communities while also reducing further traumatization. Additionally, through our work with stakeholders in the community we have heard from educators, school staff, and health care providers that there is a desire for clear guidance on what their role should be in protecting the rights of immigrant children they serve. To effectively support immigrant children and uphold these protections, the state must equip those working in the community with specific, accessible guidance to ensure they can confidently fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

**KIND urges the committee to provide favorable report of SB 828** – which will provide much-needed assurance that sensitive locations remain safe spaces for all Marylanders. We appreciate your leadership in advancing policies that uphold the rights and well-being of immigrant children and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

/s/

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