Testimony in Support of SB 977

State and Local Agencies - Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law - Restrictions on Access to Information (Maryland Data Privacy Act)

Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee

February 19, 2025

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

My name is Fatima Cortessi, and I am a mother, a resident of Rockville, an immigrant, and a domestic worker. I am a proud member of the National Domestic Workers Alliance DMV Chapter–the leading voice for domestic workers–including nannies, house cleaners, and homecare workers in the United States. I am pleased to offer **a favorable testimony** in **strong support** of **SB 977 State and Local Agencies - Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law - Restrictions on Access to Information (Maryland Data Privacy Act).**

Before having any form of protection around my immigration status in this country, I lived in constant fear. At work, I was threatened to be reported to immigration enforcement if I asked for better working conditions or fair payment for my labor. This fear not only impacted my peace of mind but also prevented me from seeking help or accessing essential services. Now that I have some protection, I can breathe a little easier, but I can't imagine how those who have nothing must feel, living each day under the shadow of this fear.

In recent years, the erosion of data privacy protections has led to increased fear and uncertainty within immigrant communities. The Maryland Data Privacy Act **SB977** takes critical steps to restore trust by ensuring that state and local agencies, as well as law enforcement entities, are prohibited from sharing personal information, facial recognition data, and access to public facilities with federal immigration authorities unless a valid warrant is presented.

I stand with immigrant communities and supports the Maryland Data Privacy Act because it will:

1. **Limit Access to Databases and Facilities:** Law enforcement agencies and state or local government units must deny access to sensitive data and facilities to individuals seeking to enforce federal immigration law without a valid court-issued warrant.
2. **Protect Personal Information:** The Act prohibits the disclosure of personal data, photographs, and biometric information, such as facial recognition scans, to federal immigration authorities unless due legal processes are followed.
3. **Provide Accountability and Transparency:** Agencies must maintain records of all access requests and submit annual reports to the Attorney General and the General Assembly to ensure compliance and transparency.
4. **Ensure Enforcement and Penalties:** The Attorney General is empowered to enforce these protections, with civil penalties for violations and disciplinary actions for state employees who fail to comply.

This legislation is crucial not only for protecting the privacy of all Maryland residents but also for fostering trust between immigrant communities and public institutions. By clearly delineating the boundaries of federal

immigration enforcement within our state, we promote the values of dignity, safety, and fairness.

In 2021, this legislature took action to protect immigrants and safeguard their sensitive data. **I** once again call on this legislature to act.[1]

I **urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 977.**

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[1] 2021, MGA HB23