
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 Judicial Proceedings Committee* February 19, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 977, which will ensure that federal immigration authorities cannot access sensitive information without a valid warrant. SB 977 takes additional critical steps to protect private data and shore up trust between the state's immigrant communities and public institutions by preventing law enforcement agencies and units of state and local government from entering into agreements for information sharing with federal immigration enforcement authorities.

SB 977 will protect personal information and mandate measures for transparency and accountability from state and local government entities. By requiring court-issued warrants to access sensitive data and facilities to enforce federal immigration law, SB 977 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. The bill requires agencies to maintain records of all requests to access private data and to submit annual reports to the Attorney General and the General Assembly. The Maryland Data Privacy Act will empower the Attorney General to enforce its protections, with civil penalties for violations and disciplinary actions for state employees who fail to comply.

SB 977 is a necessary protection to help immigrants feel safe in Maryland. Drastic changes in immigration policies over the last two administrations have shown that the fear and uncertainty immigrant communities experience in response to attacks on their families contribute to adverse health outcomes and avoidance of safety net programs.¹ At the start of his second term, President Trump has threatened to expand surveillance for the capture and deportation of millions of immigrants around the country. The Maryland Data Privacy Act is just one among many other safeguards that must be put in place to limit these grounds for further violence against the state's immigrant communities.

Protecting immigrants in Maryland supports the state's economy during a time of extreme labor shortages and a nearly \$3 billion budget gap.² In a report by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, it was estimated that undocumented

¹Gonzalez, D., Bernstein, H., Karpman, M., & Kenney, G. (2024). *Mixed-Status Families and Immigrant Families with Children Continued Avoiding Safety Net Programs in 2023*. Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/mixed-status-families-and-immigrant-families-children-continued-avoiding>

²Cates, L., Melhorn, S.F. (2024). *Understanding America's Labor Shortage: The Most Impacted States*. U.S. Chamber of Commerce. <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/the-states-suffering-most-from-the-labor-shortage>

immigrants paid \$779.3 million in state and local taxes in 2022.³ Undocumented immigrants help fund the social programs that keep many Marylanders afloat. Based on the Governor's proposed FY 2026 appropriations⁴, immigrant contributions alone could fully fund the Uninsured Employers' Fund, the Department of Disabilities, the Workers' Compensation Committee, the State Board of Elections, the Governor's Office for Children, the Department of Aging, the Maryland Energy Administration, and the Department of Veterans and Military Families with money to spare. Without the immigrant workforce, the state will be forced to cut more programs and watch as small businesses suffer the loss of both the workers and customers needed to flourish. By working to keep immigrants in the state safe, Maryland can harness the economic contributions offered by the immigrant community.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 977. This legislation is crucial for protecting the privacy of all Maryland residents and 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.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

³ Davis, C., Guzman, M., Sifre, E. (2024). *Tax Payments by Undocumented Immigrants*. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>

⁴ Department of Budget and Management (2025). *Budget Highlights FY 2026. pg 11.1*, Department of Budget and Management.