



### Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828

SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee

March 4, 2025

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

Marylanders for Food and Farmworker Protection (MFFWP) is a coalition dedicated to advocating for the rights and well-being of essential workers, including migrant farmworkers who play a critical role in feeding our communities but are too often denied fundamental protections. We strongly support SB 828, the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act, as it establishes necessary safeguards to ensure that all Marylanders—regardless of immigration status—can access essential services without fear.

For more than a decade, federal policy placed limits on Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations in sensitive locations—such as hospitals, schools, courthouses, and places of worship—to prevent intimidation and ensure that individuals could seek medical care, pursue education, access legal resources, and engage with law enforcement without fear of deportation. However, as of January 20, 2025, the rollback of these protections has left immigrant communities vulnerable to enforcement actions in spaces where they should feel safe.

This abrupt policy shift has already fostered an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, deterring individuals from seeking necessary medical attention, enrolling their children in school, reporting crimes, or seeking legal assistance. The chilling effect on these critical services not only harms individuals but also puts public health and community safety at risk. The consequences are significant:

- **Public Health Risks:** Immigrants may avoid hospitals or clinics out of fear of arrest, leading to untreated illnesses, worsening public health, and the spread of preventable diseases.
- **Disruptions in Education:** Parents may fear dropping their children off at school, or students may stop attending altogether if they worry about ICE presence.
- **Reduced Public Safety and Crime Reporting:** When immigrants fear that any interaction with authorities could lead to deportation, they may hesitate to report crimes, making communities less safe.

- **Mistrust of Public Institutions:** If ICE operates in schools, hospitals, and places of worship, immigrants may feel unsafe in spaces that should be welcoming and protective.
- **Economic Consequences:** Fear of being arrested discourages immigrants from participating in public life, leading to decreased shopping, business closures, and economic downturns in affected areas.
- **Children Suffering from Anxiety and Trauma:** When ICE arrests parents at sensitive locations, children are left behind, leading to emotional distress and instability. Incidents like this can have long-term psychological effects on children.
- **Compromised Access to Justice:** If immigrants fear ICE enforcement at courthouses, they may avoid attending court dates, leading to unresolved legal issues and denying them due process.

Everyone deserves the ability to access essential services without the threat of detention or separation from their families. When immigrants feel safe interacting with institutions—whether by reporting crimes, seeking medical care, or enrolling their children in school—our communities are stronger, healthier, and safer. Establishing clear, enforceable protections for sensitive locations is a necessary step to ensure public trust and well-being across Maryland.

For these reasons, MFFWP urges the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 828 to protect Maryland's immigrant communities and ensure that our state remains a place of safety, dignity, and opportunity for all. Thank you for your time and consideration.