



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

Dear Members of the Committee,

We are submitting this testimony on behalf of Maryland Clean Water Action and Marylanders for Food and Farmworker Protection Coalition in strong support of the Maryland Data Privacy Act. This piece of legislation will significantly strengthen privacy protections for all Maryland residents by ensuring that law enforcement agencies and state or local government entities do not grant access to sensitive personal data for the purpose of enforcing federal immigration laws. ICE has engaged in troubling practices of mass surveillance for the purpose of identify residents, undocumented or otherwise and Maryland must act to safeguard the privacy and safety of our communities.

The Maryland Data Privacy Act is a necessary protection against the growing threats posed by federal overreach in immigration enforcement. ICE has repeatedly used state and local government databases—including motor vehicle records, health data, and court documents—to target, detain, and deport immigrants. This access has disproportionately harmed undocumented residents, but it also puts all Marylanders at risk of data breaches, privacy violations, and civil rights abuses. By limiting the ability of law enforcement agencies and government offices to share data with ICE, this bill ensures that Maryland does not participate in these harmful and far-reaching practices.

Protecting the privacy of our residents, regardless of immigration status, is not just a moral imperative—it is a matter of public safety. When immigrant communities fear that their data may be used against them, they are less likely to report crimes, cooperate with law enforcement, or seek necessary medical and social services. This undermines public safety and trust in government institutions. As a coalition that advocates for the rights of food system workers, we are especially concerned that lack of privacy protections will deter workers from filing complaints with the Maryland Department of Labor when their

workplace rights are violated, allowing violations to go unchecked. By enacting the Maryland Data Privacy Act, we reinforce our commitment to protecting the civil liberties of all who call Maryland home.

A specific example to highlight why the Maryland Data Privacy Act is necessary is the state's experience through the COVID-19 pandemic. During a public health emergency, like the pandemic or as we respond to the bird flu, it is critical that people are not fearful of seeking health services, whether it be vaccines or testing. The Maryland Data Privacy Act helps assure people as they interact with the government for important public health measures.

Furthermore, this bill holds state employees accountable for any violations, ensuring that privacy protections are upheld and enforced. It also empowers the Attorney General to take action against entities that fail to comply, demonstrating Maryland's commitment to strong privacy laws and ethical governance.

In recent years, we have seen states across the country take action to limit the ways in which federal agencies exploit local resources to enforce immigration laws. Maryland must join this effort by ensuring that our state does not facilitate the indiscriminate surveillance and targeting of our residents. The Maryland Data Privacy Act strengthens our state's privacy protections, upholds public trust, and ensures that Maryland remains a place where all people—regardless of immigration status—are treated with dignity and respect.

We urge you to support the passage of this bill and take a firm stand against ICE's overreach into our state's data systems. Thank you for your time and consideration.