

Senate Bill 828
Immigration Enforcement – Sensitive Locations – Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 4th, 2025

SUPPORT

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports Senate Bill 828, which requires the Attorney General to develop guidelines limiting immigration enforcement at sensitive locations including schools, medical facilities, places of worship, locations where children gather, social services establishments, emergency response sites, ceremonial gatherings, public demonstrations, courthouses, and other designated areas, and requires state agencies to adopt these policies or provide written notice explaining their decision not to do so.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As the largest private provider of human services in Maryland, Catholic Charities of Baltimore is committed to supporting immigrants through our Esperanza Center. The Esperanza Center, serving as a vital resource for immigrants since 1963, offers support through a dedicated team of staff and volunteers, providing essential services in education, healthcare, immigration legal matters, family reunification, and general community support to help immigrants from all over the world navigate life in their new country. Throughout our history of working with immigrant populations, we have observed that when immigrants and their loved ones perceive a risk of enforcement at locations such as schools, healthcare facilities, or social service agencies, they understandably avoid these critical resources. This dynamic can lead to public health concerns, educational disruptions, and diminished community well-being as families forego necessary care and support due to fear of being separated from their children and family members.

A recent incident illustrates this reality. Earlier this year, the father of a child in our Head Start program was detained by ICE at his home as he was getting ready to leave for work. When mom brought their child to our center later that morning, she was visibly distraught as she explained to staff what had happened. Our classroom teachers, family advocates, and center director were immediately faced with not only trying to support this family, who had now lost their primary breadwinner, but also determining what their responsibilities and options would be if immigration enforcement were to occur at our facility. The staff and other children were scared and upset. The incident created significant uncertainty and stress among our frontline workers who suddenly found themselves questioning how to protect the children and families they serve while fulfilling their professional obligations. Subsequently, the affected family was afraid to take their other child who was sick to the doctor or go to the grocery store to buy food. This example highlights the unnecessary burden placed on those serving our most vulnerable populations. While our organization is working to establish protocols for such situations, developing consistent responses across all our programs is challenging without standardized guidance at the state level.

The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act would provide this much-needed guidance for the dignity and wellbeing of all Marylanders. This legislation does more than just establish guidelines – it creates places of safety where families can receive medical care without hesitation, children can learn without disruption, and communities can worship without apprehension. For service providers like Catholic Charities, this Act means our dedicated staff can focus on their true calling – helping those in need – rather than navigating the complex terrain of immigration enforcement or worrying that their facilities might become targets. In the most fundamental sense, this bill affirms that in Maryland, human dignity comes first, and vital services must be accessible to all who need them, regardless of immigration status. By creating clear, consistent standards across the state, we strengthen not only our social service network but the very fabric of our compassionate, inclusive Maryland community.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore urges the committee to issue a favorable report for Senate Bill 828.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy