

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

I, Catherine Njiru-Sewer DO is 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).

I have always had a passion for working for under-resourced patients and particularly the immigration population because of their commitment to come to the US for a better life. We cannot excuse those who come here to commit crimes, those are few and far in between, what we cannot ignore is those who legitimately come to this country and are willing to do the lowest of jobs to purchase the necessities of life and most of contribute to the US economy. I was one of those immigrants who came here lawfully and focused all my energy into becoming who I am today, a Physician who is committed to the well-being of my immigrant population, regardless of social status or ability to pay for healthcare. My patients are now very scared of coming to the clinic, it has ceased to be a safe space where they felt like they were treated with dignity. As physicians, we are supposed to protect our patients from harm and provide recommendations on how to alleviate stress, but this legislation has left us with few options, if any, on how to protect our patients from the psychological impact that ICE can infiltrate a safe space such as a clinic can have. This law needs to be stopped so we can do what we are trained to do for our patients, heal.

In recent years, the erosion of data privacy protections has led to increased fear and uncertainty within immigrant communities. The Maryland Data Privacy Act SB 977 /HB 1431 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.

The other day, while caring for a couple who are trying to obtain their legitimate papers, they described how scared their children are after hearing rumors that ICE had come to their school. The couple was not only terrified for their children but also deeply fearful of being separated from a family member. This fear made them consider keeping their children from school and the clinic. This couple also has an autistic child, so accessing crucial resources for their child's development, coupled with the stress of not knowing if their family unit will remain intact, is heartbreaking and unimaginable.

I, Catherine Njiru-Sewer DO stands with immigrant communities and supports the Maryland Data Privacy Act because it will:

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.

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.

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.

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. ORG, once again calls on this legislature to act.

I, Catherine Njiru-Sewer DO urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 977.