

**Global Refuge’s Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 828
Protecting Sensitive Locations Act
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee – Bill Hearing
March 4, 2025 at 1:00 PM**

Good afternoon,

Chairman Smith and esteemed members of the committee, my name is Krish O’Mara Vignarajah. I serve as President and CEO of Global Refuge, and I am here today to testify in support of Bill 828, the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act, which would require the Attorney General to develop guidelines relating to immigration enforcement at certain sensitive locations and require state agencies that operate at sensitive locations to adopt policies consistent with the guidelines.

A. Introduction

Global Refuge, formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), is a faith-based nonprofit dedicated to serving newcomers. We operate in 50 states and in Guatemala and Mexico where we provide services to repatriated youth. We work in partnership with the federal government, resettling refugees and serving unaccompanied children, and facilitate programs and services for immigrants and New Americans including mental healthcare, legal services, financial literacy, employment skills, and job placement assistance. While our reach is national and international, our home is Maryland. Our headquarters is based on Light Street in Baltimore, just steps from the city’s Inner Harbor. In 2024, we expanded our reach and now provide more services for refugees and other immigrants in the Baltimore area at our Welcome Center in Fells Point.

Since 1939, Global Refuge has provided welcome and hope to more than 800,000 people, transforming lives and empowering New Americans with support and resources to begin anew. Our history reflects our own deep immigrant roots and passionate commitment to welcoming newcomers, and we are proud to continue that work in Maryland and Baltimore. In the last year alone, with the help of our affiliates around the country, we resettled 18,622 refugees, including 1,178 in Maryland, and served 473 clients in Baltimore and the surrounding areas.

B. Support of Senate Bill 828, Protecting Sensitive Locations Act

I urge you to support Senate Bill 828, the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act, and I want to offer our strong support. Citizens and noncitizens alike should be able to access essential daily activities such as attending school, visiting a hospital, or obtaining emergency health services without the fear of immigration enforcement. Global Refuge supports Bill 828 because (1): it is an important step to help ensure that noncitizens in Maryland will be able to access essential and emergency services through issuance of clear guidance; (2): it helps to protect mixed status families who may be worried about the impacts of heightened immigration enforcement; and (3): it preserves the stability and continuity of communities across the state.

- (1) *Bill 828 provides that the Attorney General will develop guidelines for entities operating at sensitive locations, providing instructive guidance consistent with state and federal law.*

Bill 828 outlines schools, medical healthcare facilities, places of worship, social services establishments like domestic violence shelters, and courthouses as sensitive locations. Having the Attorney General issue such guidance in collaboration with feedback from stakeholders, such as the Maryland immigrant and immigration service community, will enable more understanding about permissible action in sensitive locations in Maryland. This would crucially allow noncitizens to go to the doctor when sick, escape abuse by seeking refuge at a domestic violence shelter, and attend court hearings. The sensitive locations outlined in this text represent institutions that are necessary for basic survival and overall well-being. Without protected areas guidance, immigrant families will likely be deterred from accessing such institutions in fear of facing immigration enforcement.

- (2) *Bill 828 will ensure that mixed status families are better protected from indiscriminate immigration enforcement operations.*

As of 2023, 81,000 U.S. citizen children in the state of Maryland are living with at least one undocumented parent.¹ Without protected areas policies, immigration enforcement actions could be taken at or near schools of all grades, putting the 81,000 Maryland citizen children and their undocumented parents at risk of arrest or removal and resulting ultimately in devastating situations of family separation. When children are separated from one or both parents, they fall victim to a ripple effect of consequences like economic insecurity, risks to their immediate safety, and adverse impacts on well-being and long-term development.² These impacts are compounded in circumstances where a child witnesses their parent's arrest or detention—not only are they subject to the negative impacts of family separation, but they have also just witnessed a traumatic event that will no doubt affect their long-term development.³ Children and young adults who remain with their parents or primary caregivers experience better outcomes across the board, shaping their development into adulthood and their future societal participation.

- (3) *Bill 828 would help to preserve the stability of Maryland communities.*

In the absence of protected areas guidance, a chilling effect will be felt across entire immigrant communities who are too afraid to access medical care, drop their child off at school, access emergency health services, or go to their place of worship to pray. Protected areas guidance is uniquely important due to the public health and safety implications: when noncitizen community members are too afraid to go to vaccination sites or receive care for contagious diseases, noncitizen and citizen community members alike are at risk. Children who witness immigration threats to their classmates and their classmates' parents may not receive the full benefit of their education, and all people of faith, including citizens, will see their worship disrupted if churches, mosques, and synagogues become targets for

¹ American Immigration Council. Immigrants in Maryland. 2023. [Immigrants in Maryland - American Immigration Council](#)

² The Urban Institute. Facing Our Future. Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement. February 2010. [Facing Our Future](#)

³ Center for Law and Social Policy. Millions of Children Threatened by Repeal of "Protected Area" Safeguards. January 21, 2025. [Millions of Children Threatened by Repeal of "Protected Area" Safeguards | CLASP](#)

immigration enforcement actions. Schools, places of worship, and hospitals are places where people come together to provide care and receive support. These locations ensure community well-being for the good and stability of our entire state. When people feel safe participating in daily activities in their community, this benefits all Marylanders.

C. Conclusion

I urge you to favorably support Senate Bill 828 to ensure that community members across the state of Maryland feel safe dropping their children off at school, going to the doctor when sick, praying at their place of worship, and accessing emergency support services. We thank you for your leadership in introducing this piece of legislation and putting forth this important measure to protect immigrant communities and also Maryland citizens. We look forward to working with you to help implement this important policy and collaborate to continue promoting the well-being and safety of all individuals, including immigrants and refugees, in our communities.

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