

February 19th



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TESTIMONY ON SB 977 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

State and Local Agencies - Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law - Restrictions on Access to Information (Maryland Data Privacy Act)

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Zackary Berger, MD, PhD

My name is Zackary Berger. I am a resident of District 43A, writing as a representative of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) in strong support of SB977, the Maryland Data Privacy Act. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across Maryland in support of state and local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

Jews United for Justice is a local organization of Jews and others fighting for humane values as represented in the Jewish tradition. More than a thousand years ago, a rabbi named Rabbenu Gershom instituted a decree which some Jews observe to this day. Simple, but neither trivial or irrelevant in our age, the edict forbade people from reading others' mail. Two reasons given for the decree: that using others' information without their consent is theft; and that we should not treat others' letters in a way we would not want our own to be treated.

Besides my active involvement in Jews United for Justice, I am a proud resident of the diverse neighborhood of Charles Village in Baltimore, which includes a number of immigrants. I am also a primary care physician who sees patients at a community center in Baltimore, many of whom are undocumented immigrants.

As a physician who treats undocumented people, I see many patients who are terrified to be caught by the state when they are just trying to live a better life. They don't know if their medical, legal, or driving records can be used by ICE to deport them back to countries they left— where they faced threats of violence, poverty, and persecution. This fear is accompanied by justified mistrust. This legislation would ensure that only a legal warrant grants ICE access to information, and would mandate state departments to record instances of ICE access.

As I write this testimony I recall the patients I saw in my work day today, all trying to work hard for their families, but all terrified that a false move could jeopardize their lives. Government should help, not hurt, and data collection should be for the benefit of residents, not a playground for those wishing to deport them without duly executed warrants.

As our neighbors, immigrants deserve to be treated like anyone should be treated – private information should stay private unless there is an attested legal need with a warrant.

On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge the committee to return a favorable report on SB977.