

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB828
Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies
(Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)
Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 4, 2025

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

When I was 3 years old a family of 7 Vietnamese refugees came to live with me and my parents in our 3-bedroom, one-bathroom house in Silver Spring. They escaped Vietnam two weeks before the fall of Saigon in 1975, and some of their extended family died in the boats trying to escape. A local church sponsored them, and they lived with us until they found a more permanent home. Their youngest daughter and I both attended Johns Hopkins University, and she became a doctor here in Maryland. Over the years, I've loved seeing pictures of her beautiful family, as spouses, children, and grandchildren have been added.

Now, I am part of an interfaith refugee ministry that helps resettled Afghan refugee families, friends who worked with the Americans and had to flee when U.S. forces left Afghanistan in 2021. Some of our families have adult children, husbands, fathers, and other family and friends who are still trapped there, or in neighboring countries. Changing policies here in the U.S. are making our new neighbors frightened for their families, many of whom remain in dangerous situations in or near their home country. Our interfaith refugee support volunteers are also afraid for them. Now that federal immigration policies have changed, and are changing almost daily, we are worried that our friends who made it here, to safety, will lose their legal immigration status and be ordered to go back. They could become undocumented immigrants.

Our friends arrived with various forms of protective legal approvals and documentation from our government. Because many of them worked with the Americans in Afghanistan, they were threatened and harrassed by local authorities when we left. America promised to accept them. We promised they would be safe here, but it is unclear whether they will be allowed to stay or not. Military veterans who served in Afghanistan know better than most the spectrum of Afghan people who partnered with us there, including drivers, contractors, translators, lawyers, judges, officials, soldiers, teachers, doctors, and so many others. According to Shawn VanDiver, a military veteran and the president of #AfghanEvac, a nonprofit that helps people from Afghanistan resettle in America: "We made a promise to our Afghan allies, and fulfilling that promise is not just about policy — it's about honor and integrity."

Immigrants, those with current valid immigration documentation, and those without, deserve our protection. For many of us, it's a matter of faith and integrity. We simply don't turn away friends in need. Our faith communities are ready to help, but we need our state legislators to help us. Please protect sensitive locations, including our places of worship, and issue a FAVORABLE report for SB828. Thank you for your consideration of this important and emergency bill.

Sincerely,
Erinn Camp Mansour, MPP UMD
Christ Church Interfaith Refugee Ministry