

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB977/HB1431 Maryland Data Privacy Act
Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee and House Judiciary Committee
February 19, 2025

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and Members of the Committees,

I strongly **SUPPORT SB977/HB1431 Maryland Data Privacy Act**. For 10 years, I worked as a chaplain at hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice care providers. I worked with elderly, sick, and dying people and their families in the DC/Baltimore metropolitan area and in small towns and rural areas in Pennsylvania. Many of the families I worked with were immigrants and refugees from around the world, and many were coping with severe vulnerabilities in addition to being sick: they were often seeking employment, working to learn English, and struggling to deal with gigantic medical expenses. Frequently, our patients and their loved ones had endured trauma in their home countries in the form of political repression, imprisonment, famine, harassment because of their religion or ethnicity, gang violence and assault, rape, and even torture.

Regardless of their immigration status, many of my patients had fear or anxiety regarding sharing personal information and interacting with authority figures because of these traumatic experiences. It is not easy to trust police or judges, and even medical professionals, after a lifetime of experiences with corrupt, violent, unjust, or bigoted systems. Immigrants frequently fear being exploited, cheated, or trapped by authorities because they do not speak the language. As a member of the clergy, clients who were immigrants often disclosed to me, and asked for prayer and comfort regarding, crimes that had befallen them. I have heard clients share about being victims of rape, armed robbery, assault, domestic violence, and other terrible crimes. It was often difficult to persuade them to report these crimes. Now that immigrants are being openly and aggressively targeted by the Department of the Homeland Security and law enforcement, as directed by the current presidential administration, their fear of being investigated themselves by the police has increased exponentially. Now they are often afraid just to come to hospitals and clinics for care they desperately need, even for their children. Health care professionals are having a much tougher time convincing their immigrant patients both to seek health care and to report crimes, because they might be picked up by ICE there, or their data shared. More communicable diseases are being left untreated, more criminals are remaining on the streets, and all Marylanders are less healthy and less safe.

In 2010, I worked as an enumerator for the U.S. Census Bureau. At that time, many respondents I sought to interview who were immigrants refused to talk to me or were very reluctant. This is because of the fears of authority figures I mentioned earlier, and concerns that data would be used against them. Without this bill to reassure and protect people who are immigrants and refugees, they will be even less likely to participate in the next Census, making it even less accurate than 2010 or 2020. As a result, Maryland as a whole will suffer because it will receive less representation and less funding.

Another motivation for me to support the passage of this bill is my faith as a Quaker (Religious Society of Friends). I am a member of Patapsco Friends Meeting in District 9A. Our values, which we call testimonies, include equality, community, integrity and peace. Hunting down immigrants using private data given to schools, hospitals, food security services and asylum courts violates the testimonies of community and integrity, because it tears at the bonds of common humanity which bind all people. It violates the testimony of equality because it creates a separate set of law enforcement rules and standards for one segment of our society. Finally, this practice violates the peace testimony because it divides communities and sets individuals and families against each other, creating conflict and destroying peace.

There is a reason people want to come to the United States: They seek safety, fairness, justice, compassion, and opportunity. I hope we can continue to be a place where people know they can find these principles here. **I urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB977/HB1431 Maryland Data Privacy Act.**

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