

Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828 – The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act

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

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) is pleased to offer our strong support for SB 828, which seeks to ensure that, to the maximum degree possible, Maryland residents feel comfortable bringing their children to school or day care, seeking disaster relief, health care and critical social services, visiting places of worship, exercising their rights to free speech, and securing access to courtrooms and other institutions at the core of civil society.

NILC is dedicated to defending and advancing the rights and opportunities of low-income immigrants and their families. For over 40 years, NILC has focused on issues that affect the well-being and economic security of low-income immigrants: health care and safety net programs, education and training, workers' rights, and other federal and state policies affecting immigrants. We believe that all people should have the opportunity to reach their potential – regardless of their race, gender, immigration, or economic status.

For good reasons, longstanding federal policy has limited immigration enforcement activities in sensitive locations such as hospitals, schools, courthouses, and places of worship. This policy aims to ensure that children and families can participate in critical programs and services that protect individual and public health and safety. However, the recent [rescission](#) of the protected areas policy has generated fear and confusion among immigrants, educators, health care and social service providers who are concerned that their patients, students, and community members will be vulnerable to enforcement actions in places where they should feel safe.

The news already has discouraged some individuals from seeking medical care, pursuing education, securing critical services or engaging with law enforcement – placing public health and safety at risk. As we have seen in other contexts, the fear of seeking health care and essential services compromises the health of everyone in a community.¹ Drops in school attendance and anxiety about immigration enforcement disrupts the learning environment and affects the mental health of all students.²

¹ See, e.g. [Research Documents the Harm of Past Public Charge Policies](#) Protecting Immigrant Families (May 2023); [Mixed-Status Families and Immigrant Families with Children Continued Avoiding Safety Net Programs in 2023](#) Urban Institute (Aug. 2024).

² Kirksey, J. J., & Sattin-Bajaj, C. [Immigration Arrests and Educational Impacts: Linking ICE Arrests to Declines in Achievement, Attendance, and School Climate and Safety in California](#). AERA Open (Oct. 4, 2021).

What this bill would do is limited in scope: it would require the Attorney General to educate stakeholders and the public about existing Constitutional rights that exist in spite of the policy change from the Department of Homeland Security, and require those under the state's jurisdiction to invoke their rights on behalf of their patients, students, and clients. This bill is not in conflict with any federal law nor does it seek to create any new constraints preventing immigration officers from conducting enforcement actions beyond what already exists in established Constitutional law. Any agency that would be opposed to people knowing and exercising their Constitutional rights should be concerning to all Marylanders.

To protect the health and safety of their residents, at least one state, California, has enacted a law (SB 54, 2017) that includes language similar to HB 1006, and states like Illinois, Rhode Island, Georgia, and North Carolina have legislation pending this year. In a number of other states, such as Massachusetts, New York, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington,³ the Attorney General has issued guidance on limiting immigration enforcement activities in sensitive areas to the maximum extent possible, consistent with federal law. The guidance helps defend the constitutional and statutory rights of students, patients, health care and social service providers and faith-based groups. The guidance helps defend the constitutional and statutory rights of students, patients, health care and social service providers and faith-based groups.⁴

Because immigrants and citizens live together in families and communities, our health and well-being are interconnected. By ensuring that schools, health care and service providers, places of worship, and courts can focus on their mission, the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act will strengthen the institutions that are central to a community's success. It will help protect access to essential services, permit children to learn, facilitate engagement with government agencies, and encourage residents to serve as witnesses or pursue remedies in court.

We therefore urge the committee to vote YES on SB 828.

Respectfully,

Tanya Broder, Senior Counsel
National Immigration Law Center

Matthew Lopas, Director of State Advocacy
National Immigration Law Center

³ See [Attorney General Guidance: Information for Massachusetts Healthcare Providers Regarding Immigration Enforcement and Access to Care and Assistance Programs](#) (Jan. 2025), [Joint Office of the Governor and Office of the New York State Attorney General Guidance to Private and Non-Profit Organizations and Entities](#) (Feb. 2025), [Guidance on Immigration Enforcement](#) (New Mexico), [Model Immigration Policies](#) (Oregon, Feb. 2025), [Guidance Concerning Immigration Enforcement](#) (Washington, April 2017).

⁴ [Rescission of Protected Areas Policies Undermines Safety for All](#) National Immigration Law Center (Jan. 2025).