

BILL NO: Senate Bill 828
TITLE: Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies
(Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: March 4, 2025
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women throughout the state. We vehemently support Senate Bill 828 as protecting sensitive locations from immigration enforcement is essential to ensuring that everyone in our community can access basic services and support without fear.

SB 828 designates a number of locales as 'sensitive' and necessitates the limiting of immigration enforcement at those venues for the immediate preservation of public health or safety. 'Sensitive locations' includes schools, medical facilities, places of worship, courthouses, domestic violence shelters, and more. On January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration rescinded protections on these areas, empowering ICE agents with unbridled authority to take enforcement actions in any of these spaces. While the rescission's fear tactics among immigrant communities are undeniable, protected areas are also unique in that overall public health and safety suffer if any particular community is precluded or afraid to access them. Public health suffers on a large scale, for example, when any one community becomes unable or afraid to access vaccination sites or clinics to receive care for contagious diseases.

Abusers and perpetrators of crime also benefit when threat of immigration enforcement silences survivors. Noncitizen survivors are currently forced to make an impossible choice between staying in a violent relationship or facing the violence of deportation. Just a week after the federal protections on sensitive locations were removed, one of our clients was threatened by their partner that ICE would be waiting for her at the courthouse if she appeared for her protective order case. Fortunately, the threat did not materialize at that time, but without SB 828, every time an immigrant seeks legal protections from violence they risk ICE intervention and never seeing their families again. The impact of immigration enforcement at courthouses greatly undermines the security of vulnerable communities and the fundamental right to equal protection under the law, shared by noncitizens and citizens alike. For those of us not at imminent risk of deportation, this apprehension also results in more violent criminals operating unchecked in our communities and threatening overall public safety.

SB 828 makes clear that Maryland stands firmly against fear-mongering and intimidation, and supports fundamental rights like access to medical care and education. By creating an environment that not only excludes but endangers noncitizens and their relatives from seeking social services or remedies through the courts, federal policy is jeopardizing the safety of all Marylanders. We strongly urge a favorable report on SB 828 and ensuring that Maryland values of dignity and compassion are applied to everyone.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.