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Testimony on SB0828 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Immigration Enforcement – Sensitive Locations – Guidelines and Policies
(Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

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

My name is Andrew Miller. I am a resident of District 11B, Chair of the Social Justice Advocacy Committee at Chizuk Amuno Congregation in Stevenson, MD, and Chair of the Synagogue Social Justice Roundtable, which has representatives from synagogue communities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0828.

Our sacred texts command us to love the stranger, as we ourselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt, and many of our families came to the United States to escape persecution. For me and for many in my community, protection of immigrants is therefore a sacred obligation. For the last several years our congregation and others have worked in support of Afghan refugee families fleeing the Taliban by providing direct support with the help of refugee relief organizations working in collaboration with the federal government. That collaboration has now been terminated by executive orders of the Trump administration.

Many of us have also worked over the last 8 years, together with immigrant support organizations, to protect the rights of other immigrants who arrived in our country to take refuge from oppressive conditions elsewhere in the world. In 2019 and 2020 I was asked by a small volunteer organization to help a father and his young son who were living in a trailer park in Howard County; he was not authorized to work and could not earn money needed for basic necessities. He had left his home in Central America after his wife died and gangs burned down his fields and threatened to kill him and his son. It was not an idle threat; tens of thousands of innocent civilians in his country have been murdered either by gangs or by the military over the last several decades. Yet the current federal administration is currently dismantling and obstructing access to asylum in this country.

For over a decade, federal policy limited Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activities in sensitive locations—such as hospitals, schools, courthouses, and places of worship—to prevent intimidation and ensure access to essential services. However, as of January 20, 2025, the revocation of these protections has left immigrant communities vulnerable to enforcement actions in spaces where they should feel safe. Immigrants are important contributors to our economy and to our communities here in Maryland, where

they make up 17% of the population. Crime rates among immigrant populations are much lower than in the general U.S. population.

The Rabbi of my Conservative synagogue in Baltimore County participated in a call with the Rabbinical Assembly last week, during which all synagogues were given guidance to prepare for the possibility of ICE agents entering our buildings with the goal of trying to find and detain employees or others who might be undocumented immigrants. If this is a concern even for suburban synagogues, how much greater the risk facing churches, schools, and hospitals in neighborhoods with large immigrant populations where ICE expects to be able to find and detain those who are undocumented.

The claim will be made that this is not going to happen and is simply spreading fear without basis. If so, why was the policy changed? The Maryland director of ICE says this will never happen. But the Acting Director of ICE at the national level was removed because the quotas were not being met and ICE is being pushed to detain more people, which will inevitably lead to detention of people who have not committed crimes. This shift in policy is creating an environment of fear and uncertainty, discouraging individuals from seeking medical care, pursuing education, accessing legal resources, or engaging with law enforcement. As a result, our communities, public health, and overall safety are at risk. This is an outrage. With the help of our legislators we must erect legal barriers to make certain that it cannot happen here in Maryland.

Everyone should access essential services without fear of detention or separation. Public safety improves when immigrants feel safe reporting crimes and seeking help. Clear enforcement boundaries build trust, strengthening communities and institutions. For these reasons, I **urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB0828.**