



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 0977:

State and Local Agencies - Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law - Restrictions on Access to Information

(Maryland Data Privacy Act)

****FAVORABLE****

TO: Sen. William C. Smith, Jr., Chair, Sen. Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair and the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

DATE: February 19, 2025

As Christians, our faith is shaped by the biblical story of people whom God led into foreign countries to escape oppression. Exodus tells us the story of the ancient Israelites escaping slavery in the land of Egypt and wandering in the wilderness without a home. In Leviticus, God commands that we remember this sojourn as part of our own story of faith: “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Paul tells us in Ephesians, we are no longer aliens. Christ Jesus has made us citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. As we read in 1 Peter, we have received God’s mercy, and we must demonstrate this sacrificial love in our lives and deeds. We are called to transcend the earthly distinctions made among us by the leaders of this world. We must proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is promised to the persecuted and answer Christ’s call to welcome the stranger among us.

This vision of God’s kingdom, this new reality, is the one to which we Christians are pledged in our baptism above any political preference or policy, and to which our church must bear witness through word and deed. This sacred call shapes both our churchwide commitment to stand with migrants and the ministries of congregations across our church who serve vulnerable immigrants and refugees in their communities.

Since the late 19th century, The Episcopal Church has followed this call by welcoming immigrants and refugees to the United States. Across our church, migrants



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are members of the Body of Christ and part of our congregations and communities, and our common life is richer thanks to their contributions.

But, in recent years, the erosion of data privacy protections has led to increased fear and uncertainty within those very immigrant communities. The Maryland Data Privacy Act **SB 977** takes critical steps to restore trust by ensuring that state and local agencies, as well as law enforcement entities, are prohibited from sharing personal information, facial recognition data, and access to public facilities with federal immigration authorities unless a valid warrant is presented.

This legislation is crucial not only for protecting the privacy of all Maryland residents but also for fostering trust between immigrant communities and public institutions. By clearly delineating the boundaries of federal immigration enforcement within our state, we promote the values of dignity, safety, and fairness.

In 2021, this legislature took action to protect immigrants and safeguard their sensitive data. The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland once again calls on this legislature to act.

The Diocese of Maryland requests a favorable report.