



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 828
Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations – Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 4, 2025

Dear Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

On behalf of the Anne Arundel County Food Bank, I strongly urge the Committee to vote favorably for SB 828, the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act. This bill will allow Marylanders seeking assistance from food banks, food pantries, and other vital social service providers to continue to visit these sensitive locations without fear of immigration enforcement.

The Anne Arundel County Food Bank (AACFB) supplies food and other necessities, like diapers and nutritional supplements, to a county-wide network of food pantries, specialized senior and baby pantries, and our Mobile Food Pantry program. Through our pantry partners and distributions, we provide these vital resources to anyone who requests assistance. Aside from basic demographic information, we do not require identification or maintain records of the people who receive our services. We have done this since 1986 and strive to provide services to all who need them in an atmosphere of dignity and respect. Last fiscal year, we gave away the equivalent of 3.1 million meals—over 4 million pounds of food and other necessities.

The need hasn't gone away—food insecurity levels remain near pandemic-era highs, and some populations—recent immigrants, veterans, and seniors—suffer at a higher rate. However, a segment of the population we serve is becoming unreachable. Due to the recent change of a long-standing order protecting areas like schools and churches from the threat of federal raids, we have seen indications that recent immigrants are choosing not to come to food pantries because they fear such raids. Earlier this month, we hosted a Mobile Food Pantry distribution in the southern part of Anne Arundel County at the Deale Library. At least two individuals receiving services that day requested food for their neighbors who were too afraid to come to the distribution for fear that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents would be in attendance.

The inevitable result of immigration enforcement at food pantries is higher rates of food insecurity among Marylanders. Recent immigrants with and without documentation rely on food pantries as they navigate their new country. By making that path more difficult, we force vulnerable families, working men and women, and children to suffer needlessly. Restoring protections to these locations will make our residents and our state stronger and healthier for the future.

We have always assisted county residents of all backgrounds. We believe that our fellow humans have the right to eat, and in a wealthy state like ours, no one should be forced to go without a nutritious meal. As such, the Anne Arundel County Food Bank urges a favorable report on SB 828.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leah Paley".

Leah Aiello Paley, LMSW
Chief Executive Officer
Anne Arundel County Food Bank