



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
SB828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)
March 4, 2025
SUPPORT

To: The Honorable William C. Smith, Chair; The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair; and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County's local, state, and federally designated anti-poverty group, strongly supports SB828, which would require the Attorney General to develop guidelines limiting immigration enforcement at sensitive locations (schools, houses of worship, medical or mental health facilities, social services programs, etc.) to the fullest extent possible under the law. This bill would also require state agencies operating at these locations to adopt policies consistent with the guidelines or submit a written explanation detailing why they are not following the guidelines and including their current policies.

As the governing body for the Montgomery County Community Action Agency, we have heard about the chilling effect of recent immigration policies. Our agency's Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center, Navigation Team, and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program provide direct services to residents and link residents to additional supports. We have heard about residents who are now fearful to seek services or to go to locations that were once considered safe. We have also heard from partner organizations that are receiving a record number of requests for "Know Your Rights" trainings. Food distribution programs have seen their numbers drop and some have even moved food distribution events inside so that participants feel safer picking up groceries.

Similarly, as our board is the governing body for Head Start in the County and the agency is the grantee, we are receiving disturbing reports that current immigration policies are instilling fear in families and negatively impacting attendance at schools. Anxious parents who are concerned for their own safety and the safety of their children have reached out asking for help to walk their children home from school. Parents are afraid to leave their homes and are afraid to linger at bus stops. Families fear being separated and are NOT sending their children to school consistently out of fear. The children, many of whom are citizens, are missing out on instruction, being exposed to toxic levels of anxiety, and are being kept from their daily routines and their friends and teachers who care about them.

This trend is alarming. At this critical time, we must do everything in our power to make sure all residents feel safe in their schools, social services offices, doctors' offices, religious spaces, and other places where residents seek education, supports, and emergency assistance. Being in a perpetual state of fear can cause irreparable damage to a person's wellbeing, and to a community--our Montgomery County community. The emotional health of a person affects all aspects of their life, including their physical health, and their ability to function in society, make a living, go to school, care for children, etc.

Undocumented individuals face many barriers when seeking gainful employment. Losing safe spaces compounds the needs of families as they are unable to find employment and are so overwhelmed by fear, they are unable to seek food and supports from community agencies. This is inhumane. SB828 can help to alleviate some of the fears many of our neighbors have and help to ensure that they continue to seek services.

Montgomery County is home to one of the most diverse populations in the country, where 20.9% of residents are Black, 16.1% of residents are Asian, 21.1% of residents are Hispanic or Latino, and 40.6% of residents are white/not Hispanic or Latino. Additionally, a third of the County's population was born outside of the United States.¹ Our board believes that the County's diversity is to be celebrated and supported. This means that we must take action to protect our neighbors, especially the most vulnerable.

The Montgomery County Community Action Board strongly supports SB828 and asks for the Committee's favorable report.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/montgomerycountymaryland/PST045224>