

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828/HB 1006
SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and
Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 28, 2025

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Committee,

I, Milena Cruz, am pleased to offer a favorable testimony in strong support of SB 828/HB 1006 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act).

My local church, where I congregate, has always been a safe space for my brothers and sisters. It is more than just a place of worship; it is a family and a home. I have been part of this community since birth, and as I've grown, I have witnessed many changes in the world around me. I am currently an associate youth coordinator and work with the youth of this church every weekend.

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.

This shift has already created 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.

As a citizen of this country, I should not have to fear going into my place of worship and seeing those who are like family getting detained. I have the right to freedom of religion, like any other person who enters this country. And I truly believe that should be enough to ensure my safety in a place of worship. Sacred spaces like my church carry a deep sense of respect that everyone should honor, regardless of their personal beliefs. No one should have to witness others being forcibly removed or disrupted during such meaningful and spiritual moments. A place of worship is meant to be peaceful, a refuge from the chaos of the outside world. No one should experience discomfort, fear, or separation in a space that exists to bring people together.

I believe it is both unfair and inhumane to take actions that disrupt a person's life in such an important setting. It is like tearing someone away from their existence in front of an entire community. No one is perfect, but some things should never happen. That is my firm belief.

If I were ever to witness such an act in my church, it would profoundly affect me emotionally. Every individual matters to someone, every person is essential in some way. Seeing someone taken away from a place of peace and belonging would be heartbreaking for me and others in my church.

I stand with immigrant communities and supports the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act because it will:

1. **Protect Access to Essential Services:** No one should have to choose between life-saving medical care and the risk of family separation. Children deserve to attend school without fear, and individuals must be able to seek justice in our courts without the threat of detention.
2. **Enhance Public Safety:** When immigrants feel safe accessing services and reporting crimes, our entire community benefits. Fear of enforcement discourages individuals from cooperating with law enforcement, which in turn hampers public safety efforts.
3. **Strengthen Community Trust:** By establishing clear boundaries for immigration enforcement, we foster trust between immigrant communities and the institutions meant to serve them. This trust is essential for maintaining a healthy, vibrant, and cohesive society.

I urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 828/HB 1006.