



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828

SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee

February 27, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

Students FAIR is pleased to offer **a favorable testimony in strong support of SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)**. Our organization is a high school student-run organization spanning Montgomery County, dedicated to advocating, organizing, and fighting for the rights of immigrants both locally and nationally. Our work includes advocacy efforts, educational teach-ins, direct actions, volunteering, and fundraising to support immigrant communities. Our student body has a representative at every high school in MCPS, and our lived experiences of being immigrants or first gen guide our work.

Since 1993, federal policy has limited immigration enforcement activities in sensitive locations—such as child care centers, schools, hospitals, 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 families vulnerable to enforcement actions in spaces where they should feel safe.

This shift has already created an environment of fear and uncertainty, discouraging individuals and families with children from seeking medical care and nutrition assistance, attending child care and school, or engaging with law enforcement. Numerous studies demonstrate the connection of both the threat of immigration enforcement as well as the detention and deportation of a family member to adverse mental health, behavioral problems, and health issues for children in immigrant families, including U.S. citizen children in mixed-status families. As a result of increased immigration enforcement in previously considered protected areas, the well-being of our classmates and communities are at risk.

In fact, the prospect of immigration enforcement can threaten all children's physical and emotional well-being and educational outcomes. Children who witness threats to their classmates, parents, teachers, and care providers may not be able to thrive and meet developmental milestones. Many places that families and children rely on for community and well-being, such as schools, Head Start centers, child care programs, and places of worship, are now perceived as possible targets, leaving the community as a whole traumatized and paralyzed by the threats of immigration enforcement. Compromising access to these supports in the midst of an onslaught of other immigration policies serves to only further undermine the safety and well-being of families and communities. When immigrant families are too afraid to take care of themselves, the entire community suffers.

This bill is an opportunity for Maryland legislators to proactively safeguard the well-being of all children residing in the state.

Many of our members have directly faced the fears of going to school and not knowing whether our parents will be home when we get out. Let alone knowing that fear that is placed when we are in school and ICE is able to enter to get fellow classmates of ours. Knowing that many schools have immigrant majority student bodies or even are affected through their family members, this uncertainty is only heighten knowing any day ICE could enter our schools.

Student's FAIR stands with immigrant children and families 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. Families and individuals must be able to obtain food to nourish their families, drop off their children to school or child care, and worship 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 and leads to children also fearing police, which in turn hampers public safety efforts.
3. **Strengthen Community Trust:** By establishing clear boundaries for immigration enforcement, we foster trust between immigrant families and the institutions meant to serve them. This trust is essential for maintaining a healthy, vibrant, and cohesive society.
4. **Safeguard Children's Well-Being:** Immigration enforcement conducted in places that are meant to provide children with a sense of safety and security can traumatize children. Children deserve to attend child care programs and school and receive timely, high-quality health care without fear that they will be separated from their loved ones.

Students FAIR **urges the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 828.**