

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 977

State and Local Agencies - Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law - Restrictions on Access to Information (Maryland Data Privacy Act)

House Judiciary Committee

March 26, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee,

I am a family doctor living in D15 and I offer a favorable testimony in strong support of SB 977 - State and Local Agencies - Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law - Restrictions on Access to Information (Maryland Data Privacy Act).

I am a member of Doctors for Camp Closure, Maryland and a member of JUFJ, Jews United for Justice. As a doctor I know without a shadow of a doubt that there is no healthy amount of time for a person to spend in an ICE jail. The medical and psychological conditions in ICE jails are deplorable. Even more heartbreaking, we know that putting a family member in an ICE jail results in family separation. Children suffer over the loss of a parent and the entire family suffers both emotionally and financially when they lose a wage earner and a loved one. Children lose their ability to concentrate in school. They can no longer thrive.

In recent years, the erosion of data privacy protections has led to increased fear and uncertainty within immigrant communities. The Maryland Data Privacy Act SB 977 /HB 1431 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.

Our immigrant patients must have their privacy protected. This legislation is critical for our patients' welfare.

If our patients' privacy is not protected then they are at a much higher risk of deportation. There is nothing that is worse for our patients' health than the fear of and then actual deportation. Once a family member is deported, the family members suffer physically and psychologically. Children lose their ability to thrive and function in school. They regress emotionally which then takes a physical toll on their bodies. Families lose a wage earner so they suffer economically.

As a family doctor I stand with immigrant communities and supports the Maryland Data Privacy Act because it will:

Limit Access to Databases and Facilities: Law enforcement agencies and state or local government units must deny access to sensitive data and facilities to individuals seeking to enforce federal immigration law without a valid court-issued warrant.

Protect Personal Information: The Act prohibits the disclosure of personal data, photographs, and biometric information, such as facial recognition scans, to federal immigration authorities unless due legal processes are followed.

Provide Accountability and Transparency: Agencies must maintain records of all access requests and submit annual reports to the Attorney General and the General Assembly to ensure compliance and transparency.

Ensure Enforcement and Penalties: The Attorney General is empowered to enforce these protections, with civil penalties for violations and disciplinary actions for state employees who fail to comply.

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. I once again calls on this legislature to act.

I urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 977.

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