

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1431

State and Local Agencies - Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law -
Restrictions on Access to Information (Maryland Data Privacy Act)
Judiciary Committee
February 27, 2025

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

I am part of an interfaith refugee ministry that helps resettled Afghan refugee families, friends who worked with the Americans and had to flee when U.S. forces left Afghanistan in 2021. Some of our families have adult children, husbands, fathers, and other family and friends who are still trapped there, or in neighboring countries, because they have not yet been approved to join them here. Changing policies here in the U.S. are making our new neighbors frightened for their families, many of whom remain in dangerous situations in or near their home country. Our interfaith refugee support volunteers are also afraid for them. Now that federal immigration policies have changed, and are changing almost daily, we are worried that our friends who made it here, to safety, will lose their legal immigration status and be ordered to go back. They could become undocumented immigrants.

Our friends arrived with various forms of protective legal approvals and documentation from our government. Because many of them worked with the Americans in Afghanistan, they were threatened and harrassed by local authorities when we left. America promised to accept them. We promised they would be safe here, but it is unclear whether they will be allowed to stay or not. Military veterans who served in Afghanistan know better than most the spectrum of Afghan people who partnered with us there, including drivers, contractors, translators, lawyers, judges, officials, soldiers, teachers, doctors, and so many others. According to Shawn VanDiver, a military veteran and the president of #AfghanEvac, a nonprofit that helps people from Afghanistan resettle in America: "We made a promise to our Afghan allies, and fulfilling that promise is not just about policy — it's about honor and integrity."

Immigrants, those with current valid immigration documentation, and those without, have rights. Everyone residing in the U.S., citizen or not, has a 4th Amendment right to refuse access to their belongings, that should include personal and private data collected from them by state agencies supposedly to help them. It was given to a particular agency for a specific purpose with the assurance it would be kept private. Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents should not have the opportunity or authority to access it without a warrant signed by a judge. We simply cannot allow ICE agents unwarranted access to our friends' personal and private data from schools, hospitals, social services, courts, and tax agencies.

Please uphold the integrity of our state agencies by protecting the data they have collected from our immigrant friends and issue a FAVORABLE report for HB1431. Thank you for your consideration of this important and emergency bill.

Sincerely,
Erinn Camp Mansour, MPP UMD
Christ Church Interfaith Refugee Ministry