

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 977/HB 1431

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

House Judiciary Proceedings Committee

February 27, 2025

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

My name is Mara Levy and I am pleased to offer a favorable testimony in strong support of SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act). I'm a proud resident of Silver Spring and have lived in Maryland most of my life. I'm an occupational therapist of 20 years and a small business owner. I'm also godmother to a little girl who was born to immigrant parents while living in my home.

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.

Last week, my little girl needed her Medicaid/CHIP renewed, and I helped her parents update their information on the Maryland Health Exchange. The application asks about her parents' immigration status and income - and her parents were scared to answer. What if ICE were to look at their answers and come after them? Should they just not answer, even if it meant losing healthcare for their little girl? Were they safe? It broke my heart to say that I honestly didn't know whether they were safe - they should be, but these days I just don't know. However, if this bill passes, they'll be safer. They can get their children the healthcare they need, and that Maryland wants for all children, without the terror of costing their child her parents.

Access to sensitive data and facilities requires a valid court-issued warrant. Personal information cannot be shared with federal immigration authorities without due legal process. 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 call on this legislature to act once again, and I strongly urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 977/HB 1431.

Mara Levy MSOT, OTR/L, CLT-LANA, SEP