

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828/HB 1006

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

Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee

February 19, 2025

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

I, Sindy Joya, a teacher at Montgomery County Public Schools, is 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).**

I am currently a kindergarten teacher working at Montgomery County Public Schools. I work at a Title 1 school with a high immigrant population. A Title 1 school has a majority low income population which makes the school eligible to receive federal funds to ensure access to a quality education. Montgomery County Public Schools mission is “to communicate effectively and provide useful information that supports student success and connects MCPS to its diverse community.” As the mission states, regardless of one's background, the focus is to guarantee success for all students, including our students that are immigrants or who have family members that are immigrants. This may include providing support through resources, information, and materials to students who need it to guarantee academic, social, and emotional success. To add on, one of Montgomery County Public Schools core values is equity. With equity and success, we need to guarantee that our immigrant students and their families have a sense of safety at our school just as our non-immigrant students.

As an educator who grew up in an immigrant community, I am inspired to create a safe and inclusive educational space for all of my students, especially students who encounter stressful and out of the ordinary barriers. To ensure academic growth and success, a sense of safety is crucial, otherwise certain behaviors can arise that can prohibit students from focusing on their academics and overall school life. Growing up in an immigrant family, I loved going to school because I was able to socialize freely with my peers and grow as an individual in all areas. Essentially, it was my home away from home. I believe that every educator strives to create that sense of home for their students. If we strip that sense of safety and instill fear in the schools, students will no longer view school as a place they can fully be themselves.

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.

If immigration enforcement were to have access to sensitive locations such as schools, our schools would face a higher rate of chronic absenteeism which is when students miss 10% or more of their school days. With the presence of our immigrant community gone, their peers will be left wondering what happened to their close friends. Immigrant families will also be hesitant to provide support to the schools due to the fear of encountering immigrant enforcement. At my school, our immigrant families heavily provide support by being involved in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), volunteering to support teachers and classrooms, as well as plan and attend school events. Without the presence and support of our immigrant families, our events and how our school functions overall will be at stake.

As I mentioned before, the presence of immigration enforcement at schools will instill a sense of fear in our students which will most likely lead to an increase of emotional and out of the ordinary behavior. Many of our students already have to cope with stressors such as poverty and trauma. Adding a fear of being unwelcomed in a space they thought was safe would undoubtedly lead to emotional outbursts. With more stressors and navigating how to cope with these said stressors, our immigrant students will negatively be impacted academically since their focus will be centered around their safety.

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 82