C. Matthew Hill
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, 229
hillm@publicjustice.org

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
Position: **Favorable**

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

Public Justice Center strongly supports SB 977, the Maryland Data Privacy Act, and urges you to issue a favorable report.

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. The PJC provides advice and representation to low-income clients, advocates before legislatures and government agencies, and collaborates with community and advocacy organizations; we actively incorporate anti-racism and racial equity goals into our advocacy work. Our organization frequently represents and partners with immigrants and immigrant communities impacted by this legislation. For example, we often represent tenants who are immigrants in eviction cases and cases seeking to hold their landlord accountable for dangerous conditions of disrepair, and we advance equitable access to school by representing students and families. We also represent workers whose employers are paying less than minimum wage, denying overtime benefits, or unfairly classifying them as contractors.

SB 977 provides critical safeguards against loopholes that entities can take advantage of to obtain personal immigration for the purposes of immigration enforcement. Data brokers hold tremendously detailed information about virtually every person in the country, including information about people's addresses, financial transactions, relationships, and detailed location from tracking people's phones and cars. Data brokers are largely unregulated and aggregate and make all of this sensitive information available for purchase. Immigration authorities are able to simply buy it without any court oversight or transparency, circumventing due process and accountability. For example, researchers have uncovered ICE's purchase of detailed cell phone location information and phone, water, electricity, and other utility records.

PJC's clients and Maryland communities will be irreparably harmed by ICE practices unless the General Assembly passes SB 977. Our renter-clients who are immigrants are already often terrified to come to court to defend their eviction cases or to hold their landlord accountable for

dangerous conditions of disrepair. At times their landlords have threated to call ICE if they complain about the lack of heat or collapsing roof. Our renter-clients who are immigrants are concerned that if they participate in a court action, ICE could gain access to case information to facilitate deportation. Our renter-clients are even sometimes concerned about reaching out for legal advice or representation to defend their cases out of fear that such information could be provided to ICE. When renters do not defend court cases and are subsequently evicted, the entire state suffers. [Preventing eviction saves the state money by reducing homelessness and state-funded safety net costs](#) related to shelter, educating students experiencing homelessness, health care, foster care, decreased incarceration, and the economic impacts of increased employment and income stability. Additionally, when renter-immigrants are terrified of coming to court because their information could be shared with ICE, they are much less likely to hold their landlord accountable for dangerous conditions through a court action – which means that the whole neighborhood suffers from the blight and decay perpetuated by negligent property owners.

SB 977 also provides important protections for clients of the PJC's Education Stability Project, which advances equity in public education by combatting discipline practices that disproportionately push Black and brown children, and children with disabilities, out of school. The threat and fear of immigration enforcement also impedes equitable access to school and infringes upon the right of all Maryland children to receive a public education regardless of immigration status. SB 977 is necessary to protect that right. In [new guidance on immigration enforcement actions at Maryland schools issued in 2025](#), the Maryland State Department of Education noted that various existing laws protect the confidentiality of student records and advised local school officials to cooperate with law enforcement and federal immigration authorities "in accordance with their school district policies and guidelines and in consultation with their attorneys." This guidance is insufficient to protect students and assuage their credible fears, particularly given the current climate in Maryland schools. For instance, in a [February 2025 social media post tagging ICE](#), an Overlea High School teacher stated: "If you want the names to investigate families to find illegals, let me know in dm [direct message]," . . . "I'll give names and school. All in Md." SB 977's clear mandate of a valid warrant issued by a federal or state court, and penalties for violations, is vital to ensuring student privacy and protecting the right of all children to attend school in Maryland.

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. Public Justice Center once again calls on this Committee to act and provide a **favorable report on SB 977.**