



# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1188

### Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement - Cooperation

#### **\*\*UNFAVORABLE\*\***

**TO:** Del. Luke Clippinger, Chair, Del. J. Sandy Bartlett, Vice Chair and the members of the House Judiciary Committee

**FROM:** Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

**DATE:** March 5, 2025

On February 11, the Episcopal Church is among dozens of multifaith plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging the U.S. government's recent rescission of guidelines that limited immigration enforcement, especially in sensitive areas such as churches, schools, and hospitals.

Faith groups joining this lawsuit claim that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions without a judicial warrant burden religious exercise in violation of the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The complaint argues that these enforcement actions interfere with the plaintiffs' ability to fulfill the religious mandate to welcome and serve immigrants.

Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe said that in God's kingdom, immigrants and refugees are not at the edges, fearful and alone, but are the very center of God's story. "We believe their struggles reveal the heart of God, and we cannot worship freely if some among us live in fear," he said. "We are seeking the ability to fully gather and follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves."

As alleged in the complaint, there are Episcopal congregations across the United States that have already seen decreased attendance at worship services and social service ministries due to fears of ICE actions. In some places, even congregants with documented legal status are choosing to stay home for fear they may be mistakenly arrested based on their appearance.

**Welcoming the stranger is not a political act—it's a sacred obligation.** When immigrants walk through our church doors, they're not entering as outsiders; they are stepping into the heart of our faith, where their dignity and stories are embraced as



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reflections of God's love. Our objection to this bill is about protecting our ability to live out the Gospel without fear or interference.

"We are told by the rulers of our day that the rich shall be first; that compassion is a weakness; that we should regard the migrants and strangers among us with fear and contempt," Bishop Rowe said. "But I ask us all to see that our true citizenship is in God's kingdom, where the meek shall inherit the earth, the merciful shall receive mercy, and the captives shall go free."

**The Diocese of Maryland requests an unfavorable report.**