

Testimony on HB 639 - Favorable

HB 639 - Transportation - Aviation - Passenger Health and Safety (Aviation Health and Safety Act)

House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 19, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Korman, and Members of the Committee,

I am a family doctor living in D 15 and I offer a favorable testimony in strong support of HB 639 - Transportation - Aviation - Passenger Health and Safety (Aviation Health and Safety Act).

I am a member of Doctors for Camp Closure, Maryland. I am Jewish and I take very seriously the Biblical commandment of welcoming the stranger. As a doctor I know without a shadow of a doubt that there is no healthy amount of time for a person to be in detention.

At its core, this bill is about upholding Maryland's values of basic dignity and well-being for all people who find themselves in our state, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. This bill affirms that Maryland should stand firm in its commitment to safety, due process, and belief in a shared humanity - by prohibiting dangerous and inhumane practices that also inhibit our own medical providers' abilities to do their jobs of alleviating suffering.

Multiple factors put people flying in shackles at greatly increased risk of medical harm. Flights have an artificial cabin environment: lower air pressure (which affects multiple body systems), reduced oxygen levels, and low humidity. Prolonged immobility allows blood to pool in the arms and especially legs, where it can form dangerous clots, particularly if dehydration thickens the blood. It also can lead to muscle stiffness and soreness, swelling, joint compression, and nerve impingement. In combination with decreased cabin pressure and/or dehydration, people can experience painful bloating, dangerous constipation, and urinary tract infections. 3-point shackles (wrists, ankles, and waist—all connected) cause pain and harms including: a breakdown of the skin and damage to surrounding structures leading to severe bruising, abrasions, lesions, fractures, neuropathies, ulcers, infections, scarring, lacerations, and injuries to the ulnar, radial, and median nerves. An additional restraint, the straightjacket-like "WRAP", is even more dangerous. The weight and tripping hazards of the ankle cuffs and chains makes it difficult to walk safely. That, dizziness, and lack of normal arm movement have led to falls boarding and deboarding.

People on ICE flights get transferred repeatedly, sometimes up to 20 times. Flights can have circuitous routes and multiple stops; two people deported to Asian countries were reportedly shackled for 73 hours and 80 hours straight. Reports are common of limited food, water, and bathroom breaks—with people still in shackles, which makes good toileting hygiene very difficult.

It is also common for people to soil and wet themselves during these flights, which is devastating but also hazardous in terms of skin integrity, infection, and spread of infection.

As a family doctor I stand with immigrant communities and support a clean bill which will reject participation in inhumane processes to the greatest degree possible--and demand that we in the medical profession have the tools to instead act as healers.

I urge the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 639.

Kate Sugarman, MD

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