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SB 504 – Data Privacy – Consumer Data, Public Records, and Message Switching System (Data Privacy Act)

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Position: FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty law firm which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. The PJC provides advice and representation to clients with low-income, 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 represent immigrant clients in eviction cases and cases seeking to hold their landlord accountable for dangerous conditions of disrepair. We represent immigrant workers whose employers are paying less than minimum wage, denying overtime benefits, or unlawfully classifying them as contractors. We represent clients with limited English proficiency in obtaining timely, meaningful access to public services and health care when they have been denied their right to free language assistance services. We also represent the children of immigrants who have been unfairly excluded from educational opportunities and immigrant residents who have been wrongfully denied public benefits.

SB 504 provides critical safeguards against loopholes that entities can take advantage of to obtain personal information 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 504. 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

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disrepair. At times their landlords have threatened 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.

Similarly, in our representation of immigrant-workers, our clients will be less likely to report an employer who paid them below minimum wage or failed to pay them overtime if they think that ICE could gain access to information about their workplace or case information. We have seen firsthand that fewer workers are willing to come forward and participate in wage theft cases because they fear drawing attention to themselves in the current climate of ICE enforcement. When one worker's rights go unenforced, it weakens the rights of all workers. Unscrupulous employers and landlords will exploit these fears to prevent workers and tenants from speaking up for their rights.

SB 504 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 504 is necessary to protect that right. In [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 504'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.

Our Health and Benefits Equity Project along with our community partners have observed a significant chilling effect with immigrant clients applying for safety net services, including SNAP and Medicaid, because of increased ICE activity around the country. We advocate to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for individuals and families with low incomes. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. Several of our clients who are immigrants have expressed extreme reluctance to apply for safety net services for which they or their children are eligible because they are terrified that their household's information may be obtained by ICE and used to rip their family apart. This

includes immigrant birthing people who have shared with us that they are terrified to apply for Medicaid coverage for which they are eligible through the Healthy Babies Equity Act, an important program expansion passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2022 to ensure that birthing people, regardless of immigration status, have access to comprehensive, quality care during their pregnancy and postpartum journey and for their baby. Our immigrant client communities are carrying the immense emotional burden of choosing between their household's ability to thrive or risking their immediate physical safety. SB 504 would help ease some of the worry present in these communities by adding much-needed protections against data sharing. It would also complement the incredible efforts our State has made to reduce health disparities.

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 504**.