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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1543

Labor and Employment - Temporary Workers
Before the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee: March 5, 2026

We write in support of House Bill 1543 on behalf of the Chacón Center for Immigrant Justice at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law. The Center is dedicated to creating a future where all Maryland families and residents are stable and secure regardless of immigration status, race, or economics, and where skin color and place of birth do not limit opportunities to build a good life and participate fully in our communities.

Year after year, more than 5,000 internationally recruited workers come to work in Maryland with H-2 temporary guest worker visas. These workers pick our vegetables, maintain beautiful lawns, and sustain the crab industry on the Eastern Shore. They are an integral part of our communities and of Maryland's economy, but they are also particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Many recruiters discriminate in hiring, mislead workers as to the terms of employment, and charge workers recruitment fees that leave them indebted on the job. These debts become a barrier to reporting abuses and, as a result, Maryland is less safe and working conditions deteriorate statewide. Requiring recruiters to register with the State will help to root out bad actors and level the playing field for employers who want to do right by their workers.

When recruited workers suffer abuses, the State of Maryland suffers. By eliminating recruitment fees for work in Maryland and banning discrimination and retaliation, this legislation would combat debt bondage, human trafficking, and other forms of labor exploitation in Maryland.

Conclusion

Internationally recruited temporary guest workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. This bill will help to make Maryland a place where internationally recruited workers are respected and workplaces work for all workers.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report on House Bill 1543.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Chacón Center for Immigrant Justice at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law and not by the School of Law; the University of Maryland, Baltimore; or the University of Maryland System.