



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony

SB 984 - Correctional Services - Private Immigration Detention Facilities - Zoning Requirement Favorable Report

To: Delegate Melissa Wells, Chair, Delegate Kenneth Kerr, and
Members of the Government, Labor and Elections Committee
From: Jim Caldiero, Lead Advocate Immigration,
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry-Maryland
Date: April 2, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony IN FAVOR of **SB 984 - Correctional Services - Private Immigration Detention Facilities - Zoning Requirement** I encourage the Committee to deliver a favorable report with amendments—amending the bill to match companion bill **HB 1017**, which as you know, the House of Delegates has passed overwhelmingly with a sufficient majority for an emergency bill.

During the current national administration, we have seen explosive growth in immigrant detention facilities across the country, including Maryland. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has initiated an expansive detention capacity, purchasing and converting large private buildings and warehouses into detention centers and processing facilities to meet its objective of 92,000 detention beds nationwide, thanks to a massive and unprecedented availability of billions of dollars in appropriated funds. ICE has purchased seven warehouses in Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Texas. Some of these warehouses are enormous, capable of housing (if that's the right word) up to 10,000 detainees.

Many of these sites are purchased with little to no knowledge or involvement by the local community. In addition, as our partners, Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ) reported, "ICE detention centers can impose significant economic burdens on local communities while delivering minimal local benefits. Once ICE purchases a warehouse, it is removed from the local tax base. Moreover, high paying positions at detention centers require specialized certifications or security clearances, so contractors tend to import staff from outside the region; local hiring is often concentrated in low-wage, high-turnover roles."

These purchases are often made with little regard to the center's proximity to schools and homes or available infrastructure such as water and waste disposal. Consequently, "Local governments may be forced to upgrade infrastructure to accommodate high water usage, wastewater treatment, garbage disposal, and environmental monitoring. In

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addition, local communities often absorb the cost of road maintenance, emergency response, and fire protection. Finally, poor in-center health care leads to increased emergency room utilization in surrounding communities, leaving local hospitals to bear the burden,” according to UUSJ.

Moreover, there are significant humanitarian concerns. The Department of Homeland Security and its subordinate agency, ICE, have a long, documented history of inhumane treatment, inadequate medical care, and unsafe conditions that have put the lives of detained immigrants at risk, many of whom have died as a result of their detention.

A recent congressional delegation to an ICE detention facility in Minnesota, Fort Snelling, for example, described the conditions as “akin to a third world prison.” U.S. Representative Kelly Morrison, a medical doctor, echoed the concerns of the detainees about the lack of healthcare and scarcity of blankets when the detainees were forced to sleep on the floor.

We must ensure that these appalling conditions will not exist in Maryland. Urgent action is needed to protect the lives of immigrants in detention before it’s too late. **SB 984** is one step toward ensuring humane treatment, ending mass incarceration and dismantling the private prison industry in Maryland.

My faith, which I share with more than 4000 Unitarian Universalists across the state, affirms that every human being has worth and should be treated with respect and dignity. The inhumane treatment of immigrant detainees is anathema to these values. Please ensure that no immigrant in Maryland will suffer the indignities described.

I encourage the Committee to deliver a **favorable report** with amendments for **SB 984**.

Thank you.

Sources:

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