Testimony on Senate Bill 245 – Favorable
SB 245 – Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

January 22, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Robert Van Rens and I am the Executive Director of the Golden Mile Alliance. The GMA works on behalf of 321 storefront businesses and around 400 other enterprises based on the west side of Frederick. Our mission is economic and community development, and that takes place in the busiest and most productive commercial district in Frederick County. The Golden Mile is the economic engine that help run the fastest growing county in Maryland, and the immigrant communities that make up a large part of the Golden Mile are integral to that growth. We cannot continue to move forward without them, and we recognize their invaluable contribution to our city and our county.

The Golden Mile, which encompasses most of Frederick's new City Council District 2 and a portion of District 1, is the most densely populated district in the County. We are on average the youngest, with the fastest growing families, and the most diverse community in both the city of Frederick and Frederick County. 40% of the Golden Mile's residents speak a language other than English at home. Nearly 30% of the population were born outside the US, and US involvement in overseas conflict tells the story of settlement in the area; Latin America, Southeast Asia, West Africa, West Asia and North Africa, and the Caribbean.

While some of the highly visible businesses in the district are ones that many people know and that serve a wide customer base, many, even a majority, are supported by the surrounding community. They were started to meet a need felt by people living far from their homeland, who wanted the comforts of familiar foods, the opportunity to gather with others who shared a language or other traditions, or they needed assistance navigating a bewildering interface with a government that had expectations different than those that they had grown up with – tax codes, drivers licensing and vehicle registration, and other official services.

These businesses are owned by people who work hard and who contribute in many ways to their communities, both that of their origin and the larger community to which they belong. They are the first to assist their neighbors in difficult times, they support each other and are part of the bond that holds the community together. Without these hundreds of smaller enterprises, the Golden Mile community would be less vibrant, less lively, and have fewer opportunities for residents to succeed.

287(g) is one of the obstacles to success for many of these businesses. The residents that support the local markets, the small restaurants and the beauty salons and other shops that serve the local community are afraid to leave home any more than they absolutely must. They are afraid to stop for gas. They are afraid to vote. They are afraid of -any- interaction which might bring them into contact with local law enforcement, because many of them are convinced that if they are pulled over or stopped while on foot, that they will be taken into custody. They know that once that happens, they will be sent to the Frederick County Adult Detention Center and turned over to immigration authorities, and they are certain that, regardless of their status, whether legal resident or US citizen, they will enter the deportation pipeline.

The sheriff insists that using his department to enforce immigration laws has helped bring down crime, but the numbers don't hold up. In 2024, Frederick County experienced a 4% overall drop

in crime, while Montgomery and Prince George's County, both of whom have larger immigrant populations in both absolute terms and as a portion of the county's population, saw greater a greater drop – 7% and 6% respectively. Neither county participates in the 287(g) program.

There is no evidence to suggest that 287(g) helps reduce crime because the immigrant population, regardless of status, does not commit crimes at a higher rate than the rest of the population. Suggesting this is a racially discriminatory mindset, and in fact the opposite is true; compared across income levels, communities with a high concentration of immigrants experience lower rates of crime than comparable non-immigrant populations. The Golden Mile is a testament to this – our crime rates are comparable to the Downtown district, and many of the violent crimes that occur are committed by someone from outside the community.

The impact of 287(g) on the Golden Mile business community is not trivial. Businesses that were thriving are suffering. Stores and restaurants that were primarily supported by the community have seen a drop-off in business. Residents that were employed by local enterprises have been laid off. Others are afraid to come to work, and some businesses struggle to fill openings. This economic engine is beginning to falter.

These impacts are not confined just to the Golden Mile, either. Many residents of the district work elsewhere in the county; while we are seeing a surge in biotech, in logistics, and in other industries that are helping fuel the economic growth of the county and the state, many of the people who work in those facilities, and who help build the new locations for these industries, live in the Golden Mile area. When the construction crews and the warehouse workers and the shift foremen stop coming in because they are worried that a green card or a US passport won't keep them from being deported, that growth slows down. Those new, high-paying jobs go away.

There is no good reason for any Maryland law enforcement agency to participate in the 287(g) program. Regardless of your views on immigration, the objective numbers don't lie. The immigrant community is a cornerstone of economic growth, and the negative effects of 287(g) on the immigrant community are also negative effects on the economy. 287(g) is bad for our immigrant community and it's bad for business, and it brings no benefit at all.

Thank you for your time.