



Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 854

SB 854 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Restrictions

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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

We Are Casa (formerly, “CASA”) is pleased to offer **favorable testimony in support of SB 854 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Restrictions.**

We Are CASA is a national organization building power and improving the quality of life in working-class Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities.

With a membership of over 189,000 members , We Are CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of members. For nearly forty years, We Are CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our communities closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing vital services to communities across the state and beyond.

Maryland must take action to protect our diverse communities where the U.S. Supreme Court has failed us. Last fall, in *Vasquez Perdomo v. Noem*,¹ the U.S. Supreme Court essentially sanctioned racial profiling: it suspended the implementation of federal court orders prohibiting ICE from stopping people based on perceived race or ethnicity. At the same time, Justice Kavanaugh issued a chilling opinion, making light of the immense harm and suffering that racial profiling causes Black and Brown people. Though the ruling was based on the U.S. Constitution, it threatens to water down Marylanders’ rights under the Maryland Constitution, too – because the Maryland Constitution is often interpreted in line with the U.S. Constitution. Because of this, Maryland must act now to protect our diverse communities’ rights to be free from racial profiling by law enforcement. SB 854 would make Maryland’s law crystal clear: racial profiling is not allowed.

Permitting racial profiling means more Black and Brown people will be hurt or killed.

ICE’s recent actions have made it all too clear: taking the guard rails off law enforcement means more Black and Brown people will be hurt or killed. Gerald Lunas Campos died in ICE detention in Texas last month. A medical examiner ruled his death a homicide, describing the cause of his

¹ Case No. 25A169, order dated Sept. 8, 2025.

death as “asphyxia due to neck and torso compression.”² This is not an isolated incident: 2025 was ICE’s deadliest year, with a rash of deaths in ICE custody.³

We are seeing the same violence here in Maryland: In Glen Burnie on Christmas Eve, ICE agents shot a man in his work van multiple times, including his chest and thigh, causing his lung to collapse and sending him to the emergency room.⁴ In Baltimore, ICE is holding our loved ones in crowded and inhumane conditions, with minimal access to food, water, and medication – not to mention lawyers.⁵ Through We Are CASA’s hotline, on which community members can report ICE enforcement actions they have witnessed or experienced, we regularly hear stories of ICE’s brutality: just last month, a U.S. citizen teen told us his father’s story. In Salisbury, ICE tackled his dad when they arrested him, seriously injuring both of his dad’s legs. In detention, he was not receiving medical care.

We Are CASA has seen how ICE targets people based on blatant racial profiling on the streets in and around Maryland. In mid-September of last year, We Are CASA heard from a man who was detained by ICE agents at the bus stop in front of our Baltimore office. He was beaten by six officers and was initially held at the Baltimore Hold Room in Hopkins Plaza. When he asked why they were taking him, they responded “because you’re Latino.” We Are CASA also received a report about a Marylander who, on his way to work last fall, was beaten, detained, and threatened with death. The officer who arrested him told him: “I don’t like Guatemalans, and if I want to, I can shoot you in the head.” After being detained, he was handcuffed for more than 24 hours without food or water. When given food, he and fellow detainees were still handcuffed at their hands and feet.

Next door, in Washington, D.C., masked plainclothes officers have flooded the streets since last year, indiscriminately arresting individuals they perceive to be Latino as they go about their daily lives – on their way to work, school, and church. ICE has targeted neighborhoods and jobs with significant Latino populations. We Are CASA has sued the federal government to stop these unlawful arrests, with a federal court calling ICE’s actions a “systemic failure” that “directly violates clear statutory requirements.”⁶

Long before the recent catastrophic tidal wave of ICE activity, the costs of racial profiling have been far too high in We Are CASA’s member communities. While Black people make up 13.4%

² Michael Biesecker, “Cuban immigrant in ICE custody died of homicide due to asphyxia, autopsy finds,” PBS Jan. 22, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/cuban-immigrant-in-ice-custody-died-of-homicide-due-to-asphyxia-autopsy-finds>.

³ Maanvi Singh *et al.*, “2025 was ICE’s deadliest year in two decades. Here are the 32 people who died in custody,” THE GUARDIAN, Jan. 4, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/jan/04/ice-2025-deaths-timeline>.

⁴ See Karina Tsui, “Department of Homeland Security changes story of Maryland ICE shooting after local police release contradicting details,” CNN Jan. 13, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/13/us/ice-shooting-maryland-immigration-hnk>.

⁵ See Dennis Valera, “ICE blames weather after viral video allegedly shows dozens packed inside Baltimore holding rooms,” CBS Baltimore Jan. 30, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/ice-weather-video-holding-room-immigration/>.

⁶ *Escobar Molina v. DHS*, Case No. 25-cv-03417 (D.D.C.), Order dated Dec. 2, 2025.

of the U.S. population, a full 22% of the people killed in police shootings are Black.⁷ And one out of three Black boys and one out of six Latino boys can expect to be sentenced to prison during their lifetimes – compared to one out of 17 white boys.⁸ It is time to take decisive action to curb these painful outcomes.

Racial profiling is against Maryland's values. All residents of our state – including the many beautifully diverse We Are CASA members who live here – deserve the right to live with dignity, and without fear that they will be targeted for abuse based on the way they look or where they are from. Nobody should be treated as a suspect or a criminal based on their race.

Racial profiling is wrong, and it hurts us. Passing SB 854 will make it clear that Marylanders' right to be free from racial profiling is beyond debate. In the wake of the Supreme Court's *Vasquez Perdomo* decision, Maryland must act now. **We Are CASA urges the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 346.**

⁷ See "Study of Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings by Police Reveals Racial Disparities, Dispatch Risks," Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, March 15, 2024, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2024/study-of-fatal-and-nonfatal-shootings-by-police-reveals-racial-disparities-dispatch-risks>

⁸ NAACP Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, <https://naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>.