

Testimony on SB0984: Correctional Services - Private Immigration Detention Facilities - Zoning Requirement

Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 10, 2026

Position: Favorable

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

My name is Karen Van Trieste. I am a resident of Easton, MD and a registered nurse. I strongly urge your committee to pass SB0984.

SB0984 will close loopholes in current Maryland law that allow for municipalities to approve the operation of immigration detention centers even if the facilities do not meet local zoning requirements.

The bill will ensure that appropriate use and occupancy permits are obtained before industrial warehouses or other buildings can be used as processing centers to detain immigrants. The strengthened zoning requirements will allow for necessary review and oversight of detention facilities, ensuring that there is appropriate infrastructure to provide safe and humane housing for the people detained there, and allowing for thorough evaluation of the impact that these facilities will have on local communities and their resources.

As I am sure you are aware, the Department of Homeland Security has purchased an industrial warehouse in Williamsport that it is rushing to convert to an immigration detention center. The facility is expected to house up to 1500 immigrants. The site is in an area that is not even zoned for overnight habitation and it is in a rural community of only 2000 residents. The Maryland Departments of the Environment, Natural Resources and Transportation have submitted a letter to DHS expressing concerns about the burden the facility will place on the local sewage system, waterways, traffic patterns and wildlife. In addition, the facility will stress Williamsport's medical and emergency services.

As I hope you are aware, in recent months there have been numerous confirmed reports of unsanitary conditions, outbreaks of communicable diseases and human rights abuses at immigration detention centers throughout the country. In our own state, immigrants at the Fallon Center in Baltimore have been subjected to overcrowded conditions, lack of clean water and inadequate sanitary facilities. To prevent such violations from happening in our state, appropriate permitting and oversight are essential.

As a nurse, I have particular concerns about the risk of communicable disease transmission and psychological distress that can occur in for-profit mass incarceration facilities. I support this bill because it will promote improved safety and health of detained

immigrants and provide for comprehensive assessment of the impact of such facilities on local utilities, resources and environments.

For the reasons stated in this testimony, I respectfully urge a favorable vote on SB0984.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Van Trieste