



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1

### Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face Coverings

*Judicial Proceeding*

January 22, 2026

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 1**, which requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to develop a model policy to prohibit the use of a face covering by law enforcement officers in the course of duty, and requires that law enforcement agencies operating in Maryland shall adopt a policy consistent with this model.

**Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers wearing face coverings have been operating in Maryland in rising numbers over the past 12 months.** As indicated by the Governor's Office for Immigrant Affairs data, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of ICE personnel and intensity of their actions in the community: the total number of ICE arrests statewide nearly tripled in 2025 – with the number of weekly arrests increasingly significantly in recent months. The monthly number of immigration-related arrests in 2025 compared to 2024 has increased more than threefold in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Montgomery County; in Prince George's Country, the average monthly arrests have multiplied by over 600% during this period.<sup>i</sup>

**Law enforcement officers concealing their identity breaks community trust and undermines community safety.** It is the duty of public servants to maintain transparency and accountability, and experts argue the increasingly widespread use of masks by law enforcement "symbolized the drift of law enforcement away from democratic controls."<sup>ii</sup> ICE's lack of clear identification as public servants when conducting operations inhibits accountability for harmful actions if excessive use of force were to occur. The use of masks by ICE agents undermines the legitimacy of law enforcement, which makes policing more difficult and dangerous, for both community members and other officers may mistake them. It also leaves community members vulnerable to civilians impersonating ICE agents with the intent to commit crimes.<sup>iii</sup>

**The Maryland General Assembly has recognized that effective law enforcement requires trust and accountability**, and, in 2021, passed the Maryland Police Accountability Act. Maryland must continue to build a relationship of trust and transparency between law enforcement and our community members. Maryland State Attorney General Anthony Brown's October 2025 guidance to state agencies when working with federal agents clarifies key standards and protocols for Maryland officers, such as using body cameras and identifying themselves when making stops. SB 1's mask ban for law enforcement officers is consistent with the other protocols stated in the guidance and does not differ in scope and relevance. **At a moment when federal leadership is emboldening ICE to act with impunity, it is imperative that Maryland leaders continue to set clear expectations for the conduct of law enforcement in our state.**



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SB 1's exceptions for medical masks, safety gear for environmental protections, and face coverings specifically for undercover work ensure that both the safety of law enforcement officers and the communities they serve are upheld. As rising social workers, we are committed to protecting the dignity and safety of our community members.

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 1. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.**

*Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.*

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<sup>i</sup> Essaheb, K. (Jan 12, 2025). Immigration: Enforcement trends [Presentation]. Maryland Association of Nonprofits Legislative Preview.

<sup>ii</sup> Levin, S. (June 25, 2025). The alarming rise of US officers hiding behind masks: "a police state". *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jun/25/immigration-officers-wearing-masks>

<sup>iii</sup> Preston, A. (August 28, 2025). Masked and unidentifiable: the risks of federal law enforcement operating without identification. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/masked-and-unidentifiable-the-risks-of-federal-law-enforcement-operating-without-identification/>