

HB1018 (SB0985) - SUPPORT

William Mascioli
2021 Luzerne Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

B3mascioli@verizon.net
301.404.7490

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1018 - Correctional Services - Immigration Detention Facilities - Minimum Mandatory Standards (SB0985)

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Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is William Mascioli. I have lived in Silver Spring, Maryland, for more than 40 years. I am among a group of neighbors who last year formed North Woodside Civil Resistance out of concern for the threat to our democracy posed by the actions of the Trump administration. I am writing to support HB1018 (SB0985) imposing mandatory minimum standards for immigration detention facilities.

Nelson Mandela once said that “no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.” By that standard, the United States must be judged very poorly. Conditions in immigrant detention facilities could best be described as cruel, dangerous, and dehumanizing. Reporting on the state of immigrant detention in Florida last July, Human Rights Watch found “conditions that flagrantly violate international human rights standards and the United States government’s own immigration detention standards.”

Conditions are so bad that ICE routinely and illegally denies lawmakers access for inspection without one week advance notice. Reports have emerged of physical and sexual abuse, extreme overcrowding, inadequate and sometimes spoiled food, a hazardous lack of hygiene, and extremely limited access to medical care or counsel. Advocates for immigrants had to obtain a temporary restraining order at one facility to get the administration to provide cots, rather than leave detained immigrants sleeping on the floor or plastic chairs. As of this writing, dozens have died under these conditions since Trump took office. And while dozens have died due to abuse and neglect, many more have suffered injuries and illness.

Soon after taking office last January, President Trump issued an executive order establishing a “no release” system drastically limiting the availability of release on bond for detained immigrants. Indeed, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act has enough funding to operate some 135,000 detention beds. This makes it particularly alarming that ICE admittedly determines who to target based on the color of their skin, the language they speak, or the places they work. Of the more than 3,300 people picked up by ICE in our state last year, the vast majority had no criminal convictions; more than half had never been charged. And it’s only getting worse: a new report by the American Immigration Council states that the increasing use of “at large” arrests in American communities has led to a sharp increase in the number of people with no criminal record being held in ICE custody on any given day.

In short, the Trump administration has created a situation in which individuals can be detained based on profiling and swept into indefinite detention in subhuman conditions, with almost no recourse or remedy. Maryland should not be a party to such a system. This bill would at least provide for basic detention standards in such centers that exist in the state. I therefore urge a favorable report and thank you for your consideration.