

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 ~~Rhys~~ Frazier and I am a resident of ~~Sabillasville~~, MD. I strongly urge the committee to pass ~~SB0984~~.

I support ~~SB0984~~ because loopholes in current Maryland law allow municipalities to approve new detention centers without the proper zoning requirements. As a result, municipalities such as Washington County have sanctioned the use of warehouses constructed to handle commodities to detain human beings, without regard to whether there is sufficient infrastructure to safely and humanely do so.

Given the human rights abuses documented at the ~~Fallon~~ Center in Baltimore, where a hundred or more immigrants are crammed into tight spaces with no access to clean water or sanitary facilities, and reports that ~~DHS's~~ plans to use a Washington County warehouse as a detention camp are moving forward despite a lack of transparency and community input, there is a clear need to develop laws that will require municipalities to conduct greater oversight on immigration detention facilities in our state.

The warehouse in Williamsport is situated in an area of Washington County that is not zoned for overnight habitation, creating a direct conflict between DHS and local laws. Despite this, Washington County officials say that they cannot require the federal government to follow local zoning laws.

Federal immigration officials are moving rapidly to expand their campaign of mass deportation and private sellers, such as the one that sold the Williamsport warehouse to DHS, have an interest in selling their operations as quickly as possible. But the way land is zoned for new detention centers in Maryland should be considered carefully and according to standards that protect human rights, safety, and the environment. These considerations should come first and foremost in any undertaking that would bring a large number of people to one concentrated area of the community, rather than being treated as an obstacle to circumvent in the name of corporate profit.

This bill seeks to strengthen Maryland's stance on zoning requirements for correctional facilities and provides recourse for violations of state law. The inability of Washington County to enforce basic zoning standards in the sale of the warehouse in Williamsport is clear evidence that such legislation is critically necessary; no individual or branch of the federal government should be able to disregard our community's rules and regulations when they enter our communities.

Maryland has an obligation to implement laws that protect the health and safety of all human beings, especially those who are detained or incarcerated. For the reasons stated in this testimony, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB0984.

Thank you,

Rhys Frazier