

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 0985

Correctional Services – Immigration Detention Facilities – Minimum Mandatory Standards

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee | March 12, 2026

To Chair Smith and the Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I write in strong support of SB0985, which would require the Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services to adopt regulations establishing minimum mandatory standards governing the care, custody, and conditions of civil detainees held in immigration detention facilities in Maryland.

People held in immigration detention are civil detainees, not convicted criminals. They are awaiting administrative proceedings, not serving criminal sentences. Despite this, they are frequently held in conditions indistinguishable from — or worse than — criminal incarceration. Maryland has an obligation to ensure that anyone detained within its borders is treated with basic human dignity.

The absence of enforceable minimum standards creates dangerous gaps in oversight. Without baseline requirements for healthcare, sanitation, nutrition, access to counsel, and humane treatment, detainees are left vulnerable to abuse and neglect. This bill closes that gap by directing the Secretary to establish clear, binding regulations.

By tasking the Maryland Commission on Correctional Standards with expanded duties over immigration detention facilities, this bill ensures that inspections and accountability are not left to the discretion of private operators or federal contractors. Independent state oversight is essential.

Several states have enacted detainee protection standards in recent years. Maryland has an opportunity — and a moral responsibility — to join them. SB0985 is a direct, practical step toward ensuring that our state's values are reflected in the conditions under which people are held on Maryland soil. I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB0985. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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