

Testimony In Support of SB 985/ HB 1018

Correctional Services - Immigration

Detention Facilities - Minimum Mandatory Standards

Submitted to: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Submitted by: Nikhil Krishnamoorthi, Howard County

Date: 3/28/2026

Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Nikhil Krishnamoorthi. I am a 17-year-old junior at River Hill High School in Howard County, Maryland, and I'm here on behalf of many immigrants and families seeking safe, secure refugee and living conditions in Maryland. I have sat across the table from the families this bill is designed to protect.

I want to be clear about why I'm here. I'm not here to represent any organization. I am not here on behalf of an institution. I am here because I have seen things that I cannot unsee, and because people most affected by this legislation cannot stand at the microphone themselves.

Let me be here to represent those families by firmly supporting SB 985.

Over three years of direct client work, I have watched families terrified not just about their cases, but about the most basic thing every family should have. Whether their detained family member has heat in the winter. Whether they can get medical attention. Whether anyone on the outside even knows what conditions they are being held in. Whether anyone knows them, or knows what conditions they are being held in. These were not complex policy questions but just people who were desperate, practical, and confused about their human rights. And too often, I did not have a reassuring answer.

What I have come to understand through this work is something that still stops me cold: immigration detainees in Maryland are currently held to lower standards of care than convicted criminals. What is ironic is that a person who is found guilty of a crime has legal protection governing the conditions of their confinement. A person detained, however, who has been convicted of anything does not. I didn't just come across this issue in a textbook. I learned it by watching real families try to navigate a system that was not built with their dignity in mind.

SB 985/1018 sets a simple standard. It asks that if a human is being detained within the order of this state, that facility must provide functioning necessities such as heating, reliable utilities, emergency power, and mandatory reporting of health and safety violations.

This bill has personally been vouched for in my community. Howard County, where I'm from, recently stood up and said that an ICE detention facility cannot operate here without accountability and proper oversight. SB 985/1018 takes that same commitment and makes it standard to the entire state ensuring that we can hold human beings in conditions that fall below what we demand everywhere else.

I am 17 years old, I have no vote, and I have a lobbying budget. What I have is years of watching real people navigate one of the most overwhelming systems imaginable, the knowledge that the people who need this bill most are not able to be in this room today.

I am here because they cannot be.

I respectfully urge this committee to pass SB 985/SB1018 without any hesitation. The people it protects do not have the luxury of time.

Thank you.

Nikhil Krishnamoorthi
River Hill High School, Class of 2027
Howard County, Maryland
nkrish3630@gmail.com
301-525-8744