



Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 984

Correctional Services - Immigration Detention Facilities - Minimum Mandatory Standards

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 12, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

CASA is pleased to offer **favorable testimony in support of SB 984 Correctional Services - Private Immigration Detention Facilities - Zoning Requirement.**

CASA is a national organization building power and improving the quality of life in working-class Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities.

With a membership of over 189,000 members, CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of its members. For nearly forty years, CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our members closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing vital services to communities across the state and beyond. We write in strong support of SB 984 and urge the Committee to advance strong protections to end the harms of civil immigration detention. CASA members have experienced egregious human rights violations at the hands of Immigration and Customs Enforcement firsthand, and their stories guide our testimony today.

A. Senate Bill 984 is a necessary, urgent, and preventative measure to stop the expansion of immigration detention in Maryland.

Despite Maryland having put an end to immigration detention many years ago, the issue has resurfaced in the form of unlawful, abusive, prolonged confinement of individuals suspected of immigration violations in the Baltimore Hold Room, alongside active efforts to increase ICE detention in the state.

In 2021, Maryland took the brave step of passing the Dignity not Detention Act (“DND”), restricting immigration detention in Maryland. At the time, ICE paid county jails in Howard,

Worcester, and Frederick to incarcerate hundreds of non-citizens for civil, non-criminal immigration violations. DND not only mandated the termination of these contracts but also banned any new contracts or renewal of existing contracts with detention facilities operated wholly or in part by private corporations. Now, the federal government is aggressively ramping up efforts to use all necessary means to purchase land for new facilities in Maryland. Given this context and the Baltimore Hold Room's use as a de facto detention facility with cruel and inhumane conditions, it is critical that the state act now to establish minimum mandatory standards for any immigration detention, to prevent ICE's further violations of human rights and the law.

B. Immigration detention is inherently traumatic and routinely accompanied by egregious abuses.

As detailed in CASA's testimony on House Bill 1018, immigration detention traumatizes families through egregious conditions and abuse. Through the operation of our ICE Raid Response Hotline, CASA has documented repeated patterns of violence, coercion, medical neglect, and family separation experienced by Maryland residents detained by ICE.

CASA members and immigrant community members have reported being beaten or threatened for refusing to sign deportation documents; being denied critical medications for heart conditions, high blood pressure, and other serious illnesses; and being held for prolonged periods in overcrowded rooms without food, water, or access to bathrooms. Others have described being handcuffed for more than 24 hours, tortured during interrogations, or threatened with death or transfer to notorious detention facilities abroad. Many were detained during routine check-ins, traffic stops, or while traveling to work, leaving children without parents and families in crisis.

The Maryland legislative body is very familiar with these abuses, as they were discussed and debated as a core part of the legislature's decision to end local ICE detention agreements in 2021.

C. Senate Bill 984 addresses these harms at their root by preventing the expansion of detention through backdoor means.

Across the country, the federal government has relied on warehouses, industrial buildings and other improvised buildings to detain people, usually with no public notice and no oversight. These facilities are not built to meet basic standards of safety, health, or humane treatment - and our community knows the devastating consequences deeply. Maryland should not allow mass detention camps to be quietly embedded in our communities. If people are going to be confined in a building in our state, that building must be explicitly approved for that purpose through established land-use processes.

SB 984 is about transparency and accountability. Detention facilities are not neutral developments. They fundamentally alter and harm our communities. They affect infrastructure, emergency services, public safety planning, and the neighborhood's moral fabric. Local governments and residents of all backgrounds deserve clear notice and a meaningful role in these decisions.

The bill also prevents private entities from operating detention facilities outside of proper zoning authorization. Across the country, the growth of privately operated detention has too often meant reduced oversight and transparency, with costs cut in ways that harm human beings. Maryland should not allow detention to expand through vague land-use categories or loopholes that sidestep community review.

D. Maryland must use every tool available to prevent the expansion of immigration detention within our borders.

SB 984 reinforces the state's commitment made in 2021 through the Dignity Not Detention Act by closing loopholes that could allow detention facilities to reemerge through improvised arrangements or vague land-use classifications. This bill is a forward-looking safeguard. It does not attempt to rewrite federal immigration law; it simply affirms Maryland's authority to regulate land use and to ensure that facilities confining human beings are subject to clear, transparent approval. The pattern of abuse, neglect, and family separation that we continue to see in ICE detention is fundamentally inconsistent with Maryland's values.

For these reasons, CASA urges a favorable report of Senate Bill 984.