

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 Laura Gillette and I am a resident of Columbia, 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 communities should be considered carefully and according to standards that protect human rights, safety, and the environment.

Detention camps in the U.S. are a violation of basic human rights, causing immense suffering for those who find themselves detained—often for seeking safety, freedom, or a better life. These facilities, which primarily house migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, are marked by overcrowding, inhumane conditions, and a complete disregard for the dignity of the individuals inside. Children are separated from their families, people endure physical and emotional trauma, and legal due process is often delayed or denied. The very existence of these camps reflects a system that prioritizes punitive measures over compassion, and deterrence over empathy. This bill seeks to strengthen Maryland's stance on zoning requirements for correctional facilities and provides recourse for violations of state law.

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,

Laura Gillette