

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNITY TRUST ACT

Senate Bill 791 – Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
House Bill 1575 – House Judiciary Committee

Correctional Services and Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement – Prohibitions

Submitted by:

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Position: FAVORABLE

DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

My name is Dr. Marie Bernadette Fouché. I am a public health physician with over twenty years of experience in epidemiology, health systems strengthening, and community-based program design. I am the founder of Safe Harbor Circles, a nonprofit serving immigrant families and individuals experiencing homelessness on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

I submit this testimony in **strong support** of the Community Trust Act (SB 791/HB 1575). I urge this Committee to pass this legislation because what is happening in our communities is not a political debate. It is a child welfare crisis. It is a public health emergency. And it is a moral test for the State of Maryland.

THE CRISIS IN OUR SCHOOLS

We cannot ignore what is happening to our children.

In a 2026 report published by *The Baltimore Sun*, Karen McCabe, a teacher at Wicomico High School, described the reality inside our schools:

“This is terrorizing the kids, and then not supporting them once they’ve been terrorized. People just need to know what’s happening. I’m really scared about suicides. I feel like that’s the next step. I’m watching these kids crash and burn, and some of them don’t even have family members.”

Karen McCabe, Teacher, Wicomico High School (The Baltimore Sun, 2026)

This is not rhetoric. This is a frontline Maryland educator sounding the alarm. And she is not alone.

Research consistently demonstrates that exposure to aggressive immigration enforcement is associated with significantly elevated rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation among immigrant-origin youth. The harm does not stop with undocumented children. It extends to U.S.-citizen children in mixed-status families who live in constant fear of parental detention or deportation.

The body of research on Adverse Childhood Experiences further confirms that household instability, parental detention, and sustained community-level fear produce cumulative, long-term consequences for mental health, educational outcomes, and physical health. Trauma compounds. **Silence compounds it further.**

WHY THE COMMUNITY TRUST ACT IS NECESSARY

When local law enforcement is entangled with federal immigration enforcement, the damage extends far beyond the individuals directly targeted. Trust collapses. Families stop calling 911. Parents withdraw children from school. Patients avoid clinics. Witnesses to crime refuse to come forward. The entire public safety and public health infrastructure of a community is undermined.

Several Maryland counties, Howard, Prince George's, Baltimore County, and Montgomery County, have already adopted local versions of trust protections. Baltimore City is poised to follow. These jurisdictions have recognized a fundamental truth: **cooperation with ICE does not make communities safer. It makes communities silent.**

But basic protections should not depend on ZIP code. A mother in Wicomico County deserves the same assurance as a mother in Montgomery County that taking her child to school, seeking medical care, or reporting a crime will not result in her family being torn apart. The Community Trust Act establishes the statewide floor that Maryland's immigrant families urgently need.

THE PATCHWORK PROBLEM: WHY STATEWIDE ACTION IS REQUIRED

The absence of statewide protections has created a dangerous patchwork. While some counties move to protect immigrant communities, others remain silent, or worse, actively complicit.

When gag orders prevent educators and community partners from speaking openly about what they are witnessing, when local leadership normalizes fear, and when institutions fail to provide adequate support, the damage becomes systemic. This is not an abstraction. This is what is happening right now on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Meanwhile, Frederick County's sheriff has openly stated his intention to continue cooperating with ICE regardless of the end of 287(g). His remarks expose the reality: without this legislation, Maryland residents remain vulnerable wherever local officials choose enforcement over trust.

THE POWER IMBALANCE THIS LEGISLATURE MUST CONFRONT

What makes the current crisis even more disturbing is the power imbalance embedded in local systems across Maryland, and particularly visible in communities like Wicomico County.

In some jurisdictions, elected officials and influential actors directly profit from immigrant labor, immigrant rent payments, and immigrant-dependent businesses. Immigrant families contribute to the local economy through their work, their taxes, and their consumer spending, yet the same communities that sustain these economic structures are denied protection, dignity, and public advocacy when they are under threat.

This Legislature must ask hard questions about conflicts of interest. When those in positions of authority benefit economically from immigrant communities, whether as landlords, business owners, grant administrators, or political actors, who is ensuring accountability? Who is safeguarding ethical boundaries? Who is protecting vulnerable families from exploitation tied to power and fear?

Immigrants are good enough to pay rent. Good enough to work long hours. Good enough to strengthen the local economy. Good enough to justify grant funding and public programs. But when it comes to defending their humanity, their mental health, their children's safety: suddenly there is silence.

You cannot profit from a community while remaining indifferent to its suffering. Leadership requires more than economic dependence on immigrant labor: it requires the courage to defend immigrant dignity. The Community Trust Act is one concrete step this Legislature can take to ensure that courage is written into law, not left to the conscience of individual officeholders.

WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE BUILDING DESPITE THE SILENCE

In the absence of adequate institutional support, community-based organizations are stepping into the breach. Safe Harbor Circles, in partnership with organizations like Crabs on the Shore and an interfaith network of houses of worship on the Eastern Shore, is building the Peer Resilience Leaders program: a youth-led, train-the-trainers mental health initiative that will equip immigrant middle and high school youth with evidence-based stress management and peer support skills.

This program will be delivered through trusted faith-based community sites because these are the spaces where families feel safe: where they gather, where they worship, where they are known. Our interfaith partners provide the recruitment infrastructure, delivery sites, and sacred trust that no institutional partner can replicate.

But community-based organizations cannot substitute for state policy. The Community Trust Act would do what no grant, no nonprofit, and no church can do alone: **it would tell**

every immigrant family in Maryland that their state government refuses to be a tool of their deportation.

THE ASK

I respectfully urge this Committee to issue a **favorable report** on the Community Trust Act.

If other Maryland counties can take visible, protective steps to support immigrant students and families, then this Legislature must demand the same level of courage and responsibility statewide. Our children's mental health, and in some cases, their lives, depend on it.

The real question before this Committee is not whether immigrants contribute. They do. The question is whether those who benefit from them, at every level of government, are willing to recognize and protect their full humanity.

I urge you to answer that question with this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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