

Laura Walsh
3409 Keswick Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21211
(410) 200-8017
Laura.ann.taylor95@gmail.com
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Dear Senator Smith, Senator Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am writing to express my support for SB0984 - Correctional Services - Private Immigration Detention Facilities - Zoning Requirement.

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.

I believe Maryland has a responsibility to protect its immigrant residents from the unjust treatment immigrant Americans are currently facing from the federal government. Disallowing detention facilities in unsafe buildings is one facet of that responsibility.

Sincerely,
Laura Walsh