

Testimony Supporting SB0984
Correctional Services - Private Immigration Detention Facilities - Zoning Requirement

FAVORABLE

March 10, 2026

The Honorable Chair, Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Vice Chair Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, and esteemed members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am writing to ask you to vote in support of Senate Bill 984 (SB0984). This bill would prohibit the government from approving the use of a building as an immigration detention facility by a private entity unless the immigration detention facility is expressly included in the applicable zoning authority. In addition, the bill prohibits a private entity from operating or occupying a building or structure as an immigration detention facility without a use and occupancy authorization or change in use and occupancy approval consistent with the bill's provisions. The bill authorizes the Attorney General to bring civil actions to enforce these restrictions.

Preventing immigrant detention operations from being conducted in buildings not zoned and deemed safe for occupancy would help promote the health and safety of immigrants and other individuals detained in the course of immigration enforcement proceedings. It would also make these facilities safer for those who work there and for anyone in the vicinity, as well as for adjacent property owners/users.

For over a year, immigrants and watchdog groups [have reported poor conditions within detainment facilities](#), including medical mistreatment and neglect, inadequate nutrition, unsanitary conditions, and overcrowding. Detainees are reportedly being held at these facilities [longer than they should be, and without adequate oversight](#). Fueled by over \$45 million in funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention as part of the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," immigration experts say the ICE detention system has "[grown larger, more abusive, and more opaque than ever as the Trump administration rushes to detain ever-greater numbers of immigrants as part of its mass deportation push](#)." The rush to acquire and develop detention facilities nationwide has created financial incentives for private entities such as warehouse owners to sell properties to the government for profit. We have already seen this occurring in [Maryland](#).

Converting warehouses or other buildings in locations that are not zoned for such use would also potentially result in damaging environmental impacts for both the subject property as well as those in the surrounding community. There could also be bad effects from housing more people than allowed under applicable zoning specifications in such a facility.

We cannot allow for-profit entities and the federal government to rush the process at the expense of human health and safety. The measures proposed in SB0984 are a reasonable safety check which should be added to the process.

For these reasons, I urge your favorable report on SB0984.

Respectfully Submitted,
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