



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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The Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0984:** Correctional Services – Private Immigration Detention Facilities - Zoning Requirement

Dear Chair Smith, Jr., Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

As Howard County Executive, I strongly believe that decisions with profound impacts on land use, public safety, and community well-being must involve meaningful oversight. Senate Bill (SB) 0984 reinforces this principle by ensuring that use of buildings or structures as private immigration facilities cannot be approved without proper zoning review, accountability, and transparency.

Zoning exists to protect our communities. It reflects years of public engagement, feedback, planning, and careful consideration of how land use affects our residents, infrastructure, emergency services, and neighborhood character. Allowing a private entity to operate an immigration detention facility without clear and appropriate zoning authority undermines these processes and erodes public trust. Moreover, private detention facilities raise serious concerns that go beyond traditional land use issues. These facilities not only significantly affect public health, mental wellbeing, and safety, but they negatively affect the overall fabric of surrounding communities.

Just last week in Howard County, my administration and I took swift action issuing emergency legislation prohibiting the issuance of Howard County Government permits for privately-owned detention centers, after we learned of an office building in Elkridge that was being retrofitted for detention use. We acted because what we allow to be built in our neighborhoods reflects what we are willing to accept as a community.

Today, I urge the Committee to **support SB0984**. This bill protects local authority, promotes responsible land use, and ensures that decisions of this magnitude are made with the full participation of the communities most affected. As leaders, it is our responsibility to make land use decisions that are not only right for our community but uphold human dignity. Together, we must stand united, not just in words, but in action, to protect our community, uphold the law, and defend the dignity of every person who calls our great state of Maryland home.

Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive