

**Testimony on Senate Bill – Favorable**

**SB 245 – Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**January 22, 2026**

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Abigail Cohen, and I both work and live in Towson, in Baltimore County. I am writing in support of SB 245 – Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition.

I am a member of both Jews United for Justice and the CASA Ally Network, but I am not submitting this testimony on behalf of any organization. I support this bill because all four of my grandparents were Jewish immigrants to the United States from Eastern Europe. If they had not been able to come to this country, they probably would have been killed in the Holocaust and I would never have been born. Instead, they were able to overcome poverty, become successful businesspeople in the United States, and raise children who were all college graduates. Like many Jewish citizens of this country, I exist because when my grandparents needed a place to go, the doors were wide open to immigrants from Europe. Seeing how much my family has benefited from immigration, I am compelled to support people who have come here for the same reasons my grandparents did: to find a safe place to raise their families and make a better life.

The commandment repeated most often in the Torah (over 30 times) is not to oppress the person who has come from another place to live among us. Often translated as “stranger,” the word actually means “immigrant” or “resident alien.” As Jews, we are taught that because we were aliens who were enslaved in the land of Egypt, we must treat the people who come to live among us as we would want to be treated. Both the Torah and my family’s personal experience require me to help and protect immigrants.

I support SB 245 because immigration enforcement agreements like 287(g) contracts create fear and undermine public safety for everyone. When people are afraid to contact law enforcement, they are less likely to report crimes, seek help, or cooperate as witnesses. I have seen this in my own community. I met a woman who did not have legal immigration status, and was in a relationship with a man who did have legal immigration status. He abused her horribly. She was afraid to seek help from the police, because her abuser told her that if she went to the police, they would report her to ICE. The abuse continued. Eventually, an advocate told the woman that what her abuser said was not true – she could go to the police without fear. She was then able to stand up to her abuser with the truth, and the abuse stopped.

In my community now, people are afraid to leave their homes, afraid to send their children to school. A friend’s child has told his mom that all his friends with Spanish names are missing from class. Children – including children who were born here – are being denied an education because their parents are terrified they will be taken from them. This is in a county that doesn’t even have a 287(g) contract! I can only imagine how much worse it would be if we did.

Programs like 287(g) have been associated with racial profiling, discrimination, and wrongful detention. I want Maryland’s law enforcement officers to fight crime, and not be entangled in

federal deportation efforts that separate families and destabilize neighborhoods. According to the National Police Funding Database, in the past five years Maryland law enforcement agencies have had to pay multiple big settlements because they were found to have engaged in unfair or abusive police practices. How many more cases like this will there be, if our police officers are forced to support ICE? We have seen many recent instances of ICE officers unjustifiably abusing and even killing people, including American citizens and permanent residents. I don't want Maryland law enforcement officers to be caught up in those practices or exposed to that liability.

For all these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 245. Thank you for your time and consideration.