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HELENE O'BRIEN
ROCHELLE PALACHE
MICHAEL PISTONE
SAM WILLIAMSON

Capital Area District

Washington 202.387.3211
Baltimore 410.244.6299
Virginia 202.387.3211

Connecticut District

Hartford 860.560.8674
Stamford 203.674.9965

Mid-Atlantic District 1201

215.226.3600
215.923.5488
302.295.4814

Florida District

305.672.7071

Hudson Valley District

914.328.3492

Kentucky District

502.368.9122

New England District 615

617.523.6150

New Jersey District

973.824.3225

**Western Pennsylvania
District**

412.471.0690

www.seiu32bj.org

**Testimony of Jaime Contreras, 32BJ SEIU Executive Vice President
House Judiciary Committee
House Bill No. 444 - Favorable
January 27, 2026**

Dear Honorable Madam Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee,

32BJ SEIU offers favorable testimony in support of **HB 444 – Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition.**

32BJ SEIU is proud to stand in solidarity with the over one million immigrants residing in Maryland who live in constant fear of detention and deportation. As an organization that is dedicated to advancing and protecting worker rights, we strongly support and urge the passage of **HB 444.**

32BJ is the largest building service union in the country, representing over 185,000 members up and down the East Coast and over 3,700 members across Maryland. Our members are primarily immigrants and people of color, and make up the workforce of essential cleaners, door-people, airport workers, and other building service workers who keep our homes, workplaces, schools, and transportation hubs up and running.

With our dedicated members, we fight to build a just society where immigrants can live free of fear and are treated with dignity and respect. Unfortunately, communities nationwide are facing an unprecedented attack by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Immigration arrests have tripled across the country, and Maryland has been no exception to this trend.ⁱ The current administration's immigration dragnet has left few communities unscathed. Our union family is no exception: multiple 32BJ members have been subjected to unjust detention by ICE.

At its core, **HB 444** is about upholding Maryland's values - fairness, dignity, and justice for all. This bill affirms that our state should not be in the business of tearing families apart, undermining public trust, or diverting state and local resources into federal immigration enforcement. Instead, Maryland should remain focused on community safety, due process, and equal treatment under the law by prohibiting immigration enforcement agreements such as 287(g).

Over the past year, increasingly reckless federal immigration policy has sown fear and distrust across our union's membership and damaged the broader social fabric that holds our state together. Although President Trump claimed that ICE would be targeting "dangerous criminals,"ⁱⁱ seventy three percent of those detained since October of last year had no criminal conviction and only five percent had been convicted of a violent crime.ⁱⁱⁱ Due to this indiscriminate persecution, workers across Maryland are increasingly hesitant to show up for their jobs, employers are seeing

Capital Area District

Jaime Contreras, Capital Area District Director

Washington, DC

1025 Vermont Ave, NW, 7th Floor
Washington DC 20005
202.387.3211

Baltimore

20 S. Charles St. Suite 901
Baltimore, MD 21201
410.244.6299

Virginia

8618 Westwood Center Dr. Ste 308
Vienna, VA 22182
202.387.3211



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disruption and uncertainty in their workplaces, and violations of labor and wage laws are going unaddressed because workers fear that speaking up could put themselves or their families at risk.

The 287(g) program has a documented history of racial profiling, discrimination, and wrongful detention. It diverts local law enforcement away from their primary role of protecting public safety and erodes trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities. When trust is broken, community safety suffers.

This climate of fear undermines basic workplace accountability. Retaliation—or the fear of it—is the primary reason workers do not report abuse. When immigration enforcement activity escalates, especially where it intersects with state or local law enforcement, unethical employers are effectively given cover to exploit vulnerable workers.^{iv} That exploitation does not stop with immigrant workers; it threatens safety and standards across entire sectors. Clear protections that separate immigration enforcement from workers' interactions with government are essential to ensuring that all workers can assert their rights without fear

For these reasons, 32BJ SEIU urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB 444**.

ⁱ ~~Kate Amara & Khiree Stewart~~, *'It scares me': Marylanders protesting as data shows ICE arrests nearly tripled in 2025*, WBAL-TV 11 Baltimore, Jan 12, 2026.

<https://www.wbaltv.com/article/marylanders-protesting-data-ice-arrests-nearly-tripled-2025/69980610>

ⁱⁱ Melissa Goldin, *Trump says he wants to deport 'the worst of the worst.'* Government data tells another story, Associated Press, July 12, 2025. <https://apnews.com/article/factcheck-trump-immigration-crime-ice-criminal-dangerous-violent-99557d9d68642004193a9f4b7668162e>

ⁱⁱⁱ David Bier, *5% of People Detained By ICE Have Violent Convictions, 73% No Convictions*, CATO Institute, November 24, 2025. <https://www.cato.org/blog/5-ice-detainees-have-violent-convictions-73-no-convictions> ^{iv} Daniel Costa, *Immigration enforcement and the workplace*, Economic Policy Institute. April 15, 2025. <https://www.epi.org/publication/immigration-enforcement-and-the-workplace/>

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