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HB 444 – Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition

Hearing before the House Judiciary Committee on Jan. 27, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty law firm which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. The PJC provides advice and representation to clients with low-income, advocates before legislatures and government agencies, and collaborates with community and advocacy organizations; we actively incorporate anti-racism and racial equity goals into our advocacy work. Our organization frequently represents and partners with immigrants and immigrant communities impacted by this legislation. For example, we represent immigrant clients in eviction cases and cases seeking to hold their landlord accountable for dangerous conditions of disrepair. We represent immigrant workers whose employers are paying less than minimum wage, denying overtime benefits, or unlawfully classifying them as contractors. We also represent the children of immigrants who have been unfairly excluded from educational opportunities and immigrant residents who have been wrongfully denied public benefits.

Public Justice Center strongly supports HB 444 – Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition. 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).

ICE activities are having a cruel and inhumane impact on our clients – compromising public safety, disrupting services, and creating a culture of fear and distrust among our immigrant-clients. For example, our Housing team frequently represents tenants who need to hold their landlord accountable for dangerous housing conditions and predatory practices. Landlords of our immigrant clients have threatened repeatedly to call ICE if our clients defend against the landlord's wrongful eviction case or seek to hold the landlord accountable for dangerous housing defects. If we cannot assure our immigrant clients that local law enforcement will not cooperate with ICE by disrupting their right to due process under the law, our clients are less likely to attend court – in which local law

enforcement officers are always present – to defend against a wrongful eviction case or to hold the landlord accountable for dangerous conditions of disrepair. When our immigrant clients do not hold their landlords accountable in court for fear of ICE enforcement, the entire community loses too. When renters do not defend court cases and are subsequently evicted, the state pays more.

[Preventing eviction saves the state money by reducing homelessness and state-funded safety net costs](#) related to shelter, educating students experiencing homelessness, health care, foster care, decreased incarceration, and the economic impacts of increased employment and income stability. Additionally, when renter-immigrants are terrified of speaking up for themselves because of the potential for ICE enforcement, the whole neighborhood suffers from the blight and decay perpetuated by negligent property owners.

In our representation of immigrant-workers, our clients will be less likely to report an employer who paid them below minimum wage if they think that engaging with local law enforcement could result in ICE enforcement actions. We have seen firsthand that fewer workers are willing to come forward and participate in wage theft cases because they fear drawing attention to themselves in the current climate of ICE enforcement. When one worker's rights go unenforced, it weakens the rights of all workers. Unscrupulous employers and landlords will exploit these fears to prevent workers and tenants from speaking up for their rights.

SB 245 also provides important protections for clients of the PJC's Education Stability Project, which advances equity in public education by combatting practices that disproportionately push Black and brown children, and children with disabilities, out of school. The threat and fear of immigration enforcement impede equitable access to school and infringes upon the fundamental right of all Maryland children to receive a public education regardless of immigration status, which is enshrined in our state constitution. SB 245 is necessary to protect that right. Maryland law enacted in 2025 requires every local public school system to adopt an immigration enforcement policy consistent with guidance from Attorney General Anthony Brown. These local policies vary and may require coordination with local law enforcement in jurisdictions where law enforcement have entered 287(g) agreements with ICE, such as [Carroll County Public Schools' revised policy passed in January 2026](#).

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.

Public Justice Center asks that the Committee **issue a FAVORABLE report on HB 444.**