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Testimony on HB 444 - Favorable

HB 444 - Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement Agreements - Prohibition

House Judiciary Committee

January 23, 2026

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

The Amica Center for Immigrant Rights (Amica Center) offers a **favorable** testimony in support of **HB 444 - Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition**.

The Amica Center is a non-profit organization that provides pro bono legal defense services to community members detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Maryland and the DMV area. Our organization has specialized in detained removal defense for the past 25 years and are leaders in creating systemic changes in the immigration system for the benefit of vulnerable non-citizen community members.

Our organization has extensive experience defending community members who have been detained by ICE due to local 287g programs in Maryland. This pipeline to ICE detention and deportation is harmful to immigrant and mixed status families, to our communities and to our State. Civil detention is becoming almost indistinguishable from criminal detention, where people are subjected to cruel conditions and trauma. But one critical distinction is that unlike the criminal system, there is no guarantee of appointed legal defense for those who cannot afford private counsel in the immigration system. Most people are forced to navigate this system alone without legal representation against highly trained and hostile government attorneys and adversarial adjudicators.

At its core, this bill is about upholding Maryland's values — fairness, dignity, and justice for all. Senate Bill 245 affirms that our state should not be in the business of tearing families apart, undermining public trust, or funneling state and local resources into a federal deportation agenda. Instead, Maryland should stand firm in its commitment to community safety, due process, and equal treatment under the law - by ending 287(g).

The 287(g) program has a well-documented history of racial profiling, discrimination, and wrongful detentions. It diverts local law enforcement from their primary duty of protecting



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public safety, forcing them to act as immigration agents rather than community protectors. This erodes trust, particularly among immigrant communities, making people less likely to report crimes or seek help when needed. Ending 287(g) ensures Maryland's resources are used to foster public safety—not help the federal deportation agenda.

ICE is already aggressively targeting Maryland communities as it is. Our local law enforcement should not support ICE in their goal of reaching their detention quotas. ICE is using their extensive resources to detain anyone they suspect is without lawful status, regardless if the person is one of their targets – meaning that they have prior immigration or criminal history. What does this look like in practice? It looks like drivers being pulled over and questioned about their immigration status based on racial profiling and biases. It looks like ICE breaking car windows and violently removing drivers from their cars when drivers invoke their right to remain silent, saying that their own policy allows for this practice.¹

Once ICE takes community members to the Baltimore ICE Field Office, they subject them to cruel and inhumane conditions. People are held there for many days and forced to sleep on concrete floors in overcrowded rooms in the same clothes they were arrested with. ICE provides no access to showers and only one public toilet per room with 20 people. There is no consistent access to food and people have been denied medications for diabetes and HIV. We have heard of at least one instance where ICE deprived a person of food as punishment. These practices are in violation of ICE's own rules and detention standards.²

The Amica Center urges the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 444.

Sincerely,

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¹ <https://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/maryland-counties-face-possible-federal-litigation-as-ice-ramps-up-enforcement-under-trump>

² <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/ice-detention-courthouse-holding-room/?nc=1>