

January 23, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett

Chair, Judiciary Committee

100 Taylor House Office Building

6 Bladen Street

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 444, Public Safety, Immigration Enforcement Agreements, Prohibition

Dear Chair Bartlett,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) is honored to express our strong support for House Bill 444, Public Safety, Immigration Enforcement Agreements, Prohibition. HB 444 would prohibit the State, local governments, and county sheriffs from entering into immigration enforcement agreements with the federal government and would require termination of any existing immigration enforcement agreement on or before July 1, 2026. The bill is scheduled for a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee on January 27, 2026 at 2:00 p.m., and the bill takes effect on June 1, 2026.

HB 444 is a public safety and community trust measure that directly affects the daily realities of Latino and immigrant Marylanders. Maryland is home to a large and deeply rooted immigrant population, with about 1.1 million foreign born residents and roughly 17.1 percent of the state population being foreign born. These Marylanders are workers, parents, students, and small business owners who contribute to our economy and civic life, including through significant tax contributions and labor force participation.

When local law enforcement is formally entangled with federal immigration enforcement through agreements such as the federal 287g program, trust erodes. The 287g program is designed to delegate certain federal immigration enforcement functions to participating local agencies through a formal memorandum of agreement. Even when framed as limited to detention settings, these arrangements can increase fear in immigrant communities and discourage people from seeking help, reporting crime, or cooperating as witnesses. Peer reviewed research finds that immigration enforcement policies can reduce willingness to report crime, undermining community safety and victim protection. Federal and academic reviews of local federal immigration enforcement partnerships also find mixed or inconclusive evidence of crime reduction and identify civil rights concerns, including risks of racial and ethnic discrimination.

MLU serves families who already face barriers to stability: language access gaps, limited access to counsel, workplace exploitation, housing insecurity, and fear that any interaction with government systems could place a loved one at risk. These harms extend beyond any one individual. National research shows that millions of United States born children and other

lawfully present family members live in households that include an unauthorized immigrant, meaning enforcement choices can destabilize entire families and communities, not just one person. In practice, local federal immigration enforcement agreements can amplify this instability by encouraging silence rather than help seeking, and by signaling that local systems are not safe places for immigrant residents.

Implications

HB 444 expands freedom, opportunity, and safety for Latino and immigrant Marylanders by drawing a bright line between local public safety services and federal civil immigration enforcement. This separation supports:

Improved crime reporting and victim cooperation by reducing fear that contacting local authorities will trigger immigration consequences, strengthening community safety for everyone.

Better public health outcomes by making it more likely that families will seek care, enroll children in services for which they are eligible, and engage with community based supports without fear.

Stronger workforce stability by reducing sudden family disruptions that can cause job loss, housing instability, and school interruptions, particularly in mixed status households.

Clearer accountability by ensuring local agencies focus on their core public safety and community service missions rather than acting as extensions of federal civil immigration enforcement.

MLU can help amplify the positive outcomes of HB 444 through coordinated community education, partnership with trusted service providers, and language accessible outreach that explains what the bill changes and what it does not change. We can also work with local stakeholders to strengthen trust building practices, connect families to legal service providers, and promote civic engagement that ensures Marylanders understand their rights and the public safety purpose of keeping local services accessible to all residents.

For these reasons, MLU urges the Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 444.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

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