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Local Law Enforcement Must Focus on Keeping Marylanders Safe, Not on Immigration Enforcement

Position Statement Supporting House Bill 444

Given Before the House Judiciary Committee

The safety of all Marylanders is the key function of state and local law enforcement agencies and to ensure this, community trust and cooperation is vital. When local law enforcement agents collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), it erodes trust within immigrant communities, discouraging individuals from reporting crimes, seeking assistance and cooperating with law enforcement. This creates a chilling effect that makes our communities less safe for everyone. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 444** because it would prohibit local agencies from entering into federal immigration enforcement agreements and terminate existing ones, thereby ensuring that state and local resources are used for public safety priorities rather than being diverted to enforce federal immigration policies.

A key provision of HB 444 is that prohibits local law enforcement from engaging in federal immigration enforcement activities. This is crucial to maintaining public safety in our communities. When local police act as enforcers of federal immigration laws, it erodes the relationship between law enforcement and immigrant communities. Fear of deportation or detention makes members of the community hesitant to report crimes, cooperate with investigations, or seek assistance during emergencies. This bill will help ensure that immigrants, regardless of status, can safely engage with local law enforcement without fear of being turned over to federal authorities, which is vital to fostering trust and cooperation. This bill provides a much-needed safeguard for immigrant families ensuring that individuals are not subject to racial profiling, unnecessary detention or deportation simply due to their immigration status.

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).

Marylanders benefit from state policies that make our state a welcoming place for immigrants. Just over 1 million immigrants reside in Maryland, working sectors across our state's economy¹. About 36 percent of Main Street business owners in Maryland are immigrants, operating storefront shops that help keep downtown areas vibrant. About 21 percent of Maryland's workers are immigrants including 33 percent of child care workers, 29 percent of registered nurses and 27 percent of software developers. Immigrant workers and business owners generate \$85 billion of economic output in Maryland. In fact, when immigrants move to Maryland the

economy grows and this doesn't mean fewer jobs, it means more jobs, more consumers, more workers and more business owners.

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.

The Maryland Center on Economic Policy urges the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 444.

¹ Immigration Research Institute, Immigrants Are A Vital Part of Maryland's Future.