



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony IN FAVOR of SB 1 Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers -- Prohibition on Face Coverings

TO: Del. J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair, Del. Debra Davis, Vice-Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Jim Caldiero, Lead Advocate for Immigration,
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
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Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony IN FAVOR of SB 1, Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings that will establish a model policy prohibiting the use of a face covering by a law enforcement officer in the course of duty.

As a child growing up in New York City in the late 1940's, early 1950's, I would watch *Officer Joe Bolton* on WPIX-TV as he introduced various children's programs. He was an avuncular, friendly face, much like the real policemen who walked the beat. In the playgrounds, on the streets, on your way to school, you knew you were safe as they offered comforting smiles, but you knew they'd tell your mom if you didn't behave.

You could trust these police officers.

Their *faces* told you so.

Today, however, instead of trust, fear pervades every immigrant community as strong-armed, unaccountable, unidentifiable Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents roam the streets, abducting individuals, throwing them into unmarked vans, separating parents from their children. Some states, like California, New York, Massachusetts, have already recognized the dysfunction unidentifiable federal agents present, the fear and mistrust they engender, the abuse of power that can come when hiding behind a mask, and are working on legislation to protect their citizens. For example:

- CA: No Secret Police Act;
- NY: Mandating End of Lawless Tactics (MELT) Act;
- MA: Ensuring Law Enforcement Identification and Public Trust Act.

In addition to community trust and reducing fear, there are other reasons to ensure that all law enforcement officers are clearly identifiable.

They include:

- *Public Safety*: Identifiable law enforcement officers can prevent potential misunderstandings between agents and the public that can lead to violent encounters, as we recently witnessed in Minneapolis.
- *Due Process*: Identifiable law enforcement officers can uphold the right to due process and prevent wrongful detention. Face coverings can deter immigrants from seeking legal assistance or reporting violations as they may fear for their safety.
- *Prevention of Impersonation*: Identifiable law enforcement officers prevent the misuse of information and potential vigilantism.

As former ICE Assistant Director, Scott Schuchart, said, “If somebody comes up to you with a mask and a T-shirt and no badge, why would you think that they are exercising a legitimate authority, as opposed to being a violent criminal trying to do you harm? How do you know that you need to not resist to avoid arrest, as opposed to resist arrest to possibly survive the encounter?”

My Unitarian Universalist faith calls me to promote and affirm justice, equity and compassion as we relate to each other. Faith that our law enforcement officers will do the right thing, not fear, should guide us. We should not turn our neighbors into suspects. We must restore trust between law enforcement officers and all our Maryland communities.

I encourage you to vote IN FAVOR on SB 1.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sources:

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UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,

www.uulmmd.org info@uulmmd.org www.facebook.com/uulmmd www.Twitter.com/uulmmd