

House Bill 309
Judicial Facilities - Stops, Detentions, and Arrests - Limitations
Judiciary Committee
2/2/2026
Favorable

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB309, which prohibits, with specific exceptions, law enforcement or other government agents from stopping, detaining, or arresting individuals for certain civil offenses while they are attending judicial proceedings or traveling within one mile of a judicial facility. The bill also provides that evidence obtained in violation of the Act is inadmissible in State and local proceedings.

For more than a century, Catholic Charities of Baltimore has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest private provider of human services in Maryland, we accompany individuals and families as they age with dignity, pursue employment and education, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve independence, and access essential supports. We also welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities through programs such as the Esperanza Center, Head Start, and meal programs that serve families in need.

Since 1963, the Esperanza Center has served as a vital resource for immigrants, providing legal, social, and supportive services through a dedicated team of staff and volunteers. Each year, Catholic Charities works closely with thousands of immigrant Marylanders, many of whom must attend proceedings in State district and circuit courts to resolve civil matters critical to their stability and safety. When individuals are afraid to attend court due to fear of civil immigration enforcement, justice is delayed or denied, not only for them, but for the courts and communities as a whole.

Our experience illustrates why HB309 is necessary.

Rent Court

We assisted a single mother who recently received asylum and temporarily lost income following emergency surgery. As a result, eviction proceedings were initiated. By attending multiple rent court hearings, she was able to resolve her cases, avoid eviction, and identify serious housing code violations, including rodent infestation and a broken window. These court appearances were essential to stabilizing her family's housing and ensuring safe living conditions. Without the ability to safely attend court, this family could have lost their home.

Circuit Court-Child Custody (SIJS Cases)

Catholic Charities regularly assists children eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Custody hearings in circuit court are a required step in this process and are essential to family stability and child safety. If children and their caregivers were unable to attend these hearings due to fear of civil enforcement at or near courthouses, they would be unable to complete lawful processes designed to protect vulnerable youth.

District Court-Victims of Domestic Violence

Many victims of domestic violence must attend court to seek protection orders or testify against their abusers. Fear of enforcement at courthouses discourages victims from coming forward, undermining public safety. In one case, a survivor of domestic violence was improperly “counter-charged” by her abuser. Despite significant fear, she attended court, where all charges against her were dismissed. Her presence allowed the court to see the full context and prevent misuse of the legal system. Ensuring victims can safely attend court is essential to holding perpetrators accountable and protecting communities.

Across these cases, access to judicial proceedings is not optional, it is fundamental. Fear of civil enforcement at or near courthouses prevents individuals from resolving housing disputes, complying with court orders, protecting children, and seeking safety from violence. This fear undermines the efficiency of our courts and compromises public safety for all Marylanders.

HB309 helps ensure that all individuals, regardless of immigration status, can safely access the judicial system to resolve civil matters, comply with court requirements, and seek justice. This, in turn, allows cases to move forward, protect victims, and strengthens trust in our legal system.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB309.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy.