

March 6, 2026

Good afternoon, Delegate Sandy Barlett, Chair, Delegate Debra Davis, Vice Chair, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT OF HB 1415**, “Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Identification.” I write as a Maryland resident deeply concerned with both community safety and the integrity of our law enforcement institutions.

HB 1415 requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to develop a model policy mandating that law enforcement officers display visible identification while performing duties in the State and requires all law enforcement agencies with officers operating in Maryland, including federal agencies, to adopt a consistent identification policy.

Marylanders have witnessed, and are increasingly fearful of, immigration enforcement actions conducted by plainclothes officers in unmarked vehicles, often with faces covered and little or no visible identification, which residents experience as abductions rather than lawful arrests. Recent data show that ICE arrests in Maryland nearly tripled from roughly 1,165 (January–October 2024) to more than 3,300 in the same ten-month period in 2025, with a substantial share of arrests occurring in public spaces such as streets and courthouses.

At the same time, researchers and advocates have documented a rise in the impersonation of federal officers, including individuals falsely claiming to be ICE or other federal agents to extort, kidnap, or intimidate community members. When genuine officers do not display clear identification, residents cannot distinguish lawful enforcement from criminal impersonation, which undermines public safety and cooperation.

HB 1415 aligns Maryland with a growing national recognition that law enforcement must not appear as “secret police,” especially in the immigration context, but it does so in a carefully crafted and more targeted way than some other measures.

HB 1415 benefits:

1. Prevention of impersonation and anonymous abductions

- Clear, visible identification makes it significantly harder for criminals to pose as ICE or other law enforcement officers to kidnap, rob, or extort community members.americanprogress.
- When residents can see an officer’s agency and badge number, they can verify legitimacy and later file complaints, which deters both impersonators and misconduct by real officers.
- In the immigration context, visible ID requirements reduce the perception of “black-bag” style abductions and help people understand that they are dealing with government agents operating under law, not random.

2. Improved public trust and cooperation

- Data and testimony from Maryland and other jurisdictions show that fear of ICE and confusion about which officers may be working with federal immigration authorities discourages victims and witnesses from reporting crimes.

- By affirming that officers in Maryland cannot hide their identity while exercising authority—except in narrow, documented circumstances HB 1415 reinforces constitutional policing and may increase crime reporting in immigrant and mixed-status communities.
 - This complements Maryland’s recent prohibition on 287(g) agreements and emerging standards for immigrant detention centers, signaling a coherent state policy: local public safety is paramount, and communities should not fear anonymous enforcement actions.
- 3. Clarity and consistency for officers and agencies**
- A statewide model policy on size, placement, and legibility of identification, plus specific rules for different uniforms and plainclothes operations, reduces confusion and inconsistency across agencies.
 - Officers benefit from clear guidance on when and how they must display ID, including documented exceptions for immediate safety threats and undercover work, which can be incorporated into standardized training.
 - Federal officers operating in Maryland will have a predictable set of expectations when exercising authority here, much like they already navigate varying state rules on vehicle pursuits, firearms, or joint task force protocols.
- 4. Accountability and enforceable consequences**
- By making knowing, willful violations a misdemeanor and explicitly waving immunity for civil suits based on such violations, HB 1415 gives real teeth to the identification requirement.
 - Classifying violations as “police misconduct” integrates this duty into Maryland’s existing accountability frameworks, including complaint mechanisms and disciplinary processes overseen by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission.
 - These enforcement mechanisms incentivize agencies to adopt robust internal policies, supervision, and training to ensure compliance.
 - Framed correctly, HB 1415 protects federal officers as well, by distinguishing them from impersonators and providing clear rules that reduce the risk of confrontation and misunderstanding with local residents.

In 2026, the General Assembly is grappling with a suite of bills seeking to delineate state and local roles in immigration enforcement, regulate detention conditions, and reinforce community trust. HB 1415 fits squarely within this agenda: it is a modest, practical measure that advances three widely shared goals i.e. public safety, prevention of impersonation, and transparency and accountability explicitly identified in the model policy language the Commission must adopt.

Taken together with the prohibition on 287(g) agreements and emerging detention-center standards, HB 1415 sends a consistent message: Maryland will cooperate with federal partners on genuine criminal threats, but it will not accept anonymous, masked, or unidentified enforcement actions that look and feel like abductions to our residents. It protects the dignity and safety of Marylanders while also protecting the legitimacy and safety of law enforcement officers who operate here.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1415.

Thank you for your consideration.

Eileen Benecke, Frederick, Maryland