

## Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 155

HB 155 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings

House Judiciary Committee

February 20, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee,

Amica Center for Immigrant Rights (Amica Center) is pleased to offer **a favorable testimony in strong support of HB 155 - Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings.**

**The Amica Center.** We are a non-profit organization that provides pro bono legal defense services to community members detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Maryland and the DMV area. Our organization has specialized in detained removal defense for the past 25 years and are leaders in creating systemic changes in the immigration system for the benefit of vulnerable non-citizen community members.

**Masked Law Enforcement Erodes Public Trust.** Law enforcement officers who wear masks break the public trust by creating a sense of intimidation and fear into engagements with community members.<sup>1</sup> Mask wearing contributes to the risk of escalation because it leaves doubt to the legitimacy of the law enforcement action and to whether it is a law enforcement officer engaging in valid operations. Even former ICE policy regulatory agents have spoken publicly about the dangers of utilizing masks in the field.<sup>2</sup> As pointed out by former ICE employee, ‘It’s very dangerous. . . [h]ow do you know that you need to not resist to avoid arrest, as opposed to resist arrest to possibly survive the encounter?’

**Our Clients Fear Masked Officers.** Our organization has been providing legal services to non-citizens in ICE custody for over 25 years. But this past year has been different from anything our clients have previously confronted. They are terrified of the sight of masked

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<sup>1</sup> Leila Fadel, et. al, “Masked ICE agents are spurring fear and confusion across the U.S.”, *National Public Radio*, July 10, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/09/nx-s1-5440311/ice-raids-masked-agents>

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Jarvie, “ICE agents wearing mask add new levels of intimidation, confusion during L.A. raids,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 2025, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-07-07/masking-of-federal-agents-very-dangerous-and-perfectly-legal>



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officers posted up in immigrant neighborhoods. There is no certainty of whether the masked people pulling them over in their vehicle is law enforcement. Additionally, many of our clients have experienced persecution or torture in the past at the hands of law enforcement or private actors and being approached by masked individuals can invoke a similar type of fear.

**House Bill 155 takes a critical step towards affirming that there are transparency and accountability for law enforcement officers engaged in their duties in Maryland.**

Through the course of our work, we regularly represent community members who have been the victims of crimes and who have relied on law enforcement for help in their most vulnerable moments. Trust and accountability in our law enforcement is foundational to creating a sense of safety for everyone in Maryland. No one, including law enforcement officers, are beyond reproach of our legal system. Prohibiting wearing masks holds officers accountable for their actions.

**Additionally, HB 155 includes sensible exceptions in circumstances that require masks.** This bill recognizes circumstances that may require the use of masks by law enforcement. As such, it is well tailored to not impede law enforcement officers from engaging in their duties.

The individuals that we serve would greatly benefit from this bill. It would return to them a semblance of safety in their daily lives that is no longer there. Everyone should be free of fear and intimidation from law enforcement officers. Clear law enforcement boundaries build trust, strengthening communities and institutions. **For these reasons, the Amica Center urges the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 1.**

Sincerely,

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