



## Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 155

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

House Judiciary Committee

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

We Are CASA (formerly, “CASA”) is pleased to offer **favorable testimony** in **support** of **HB 155 - Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings**.

We Are CASA is a national organization building power and improving the quality of life in working-class Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities.

With a membership of over 189,000 members, We Are CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of members. For nearly forty years, We Are CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our communities closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing vital services to communities across the state and beyond.

### **A. Masked law enforcement terrorizes communities and breaks public trust.**

As one federal district court recently explained, “ICE goes masked for a single reason—to terrorize Americans into quiescence.”<sup>1</sup> The data bears this out: 86% of people report increased fear of violence when officers wear facial coverings.<sup>2</sup> The recent experiences of community members across Maryland bear this out, too.

We Are CASA operates a hotline through which community members can report ICE enforcement actions they have witnessed or experienced. In the last six months of 2025 alone, We Are CASA received over 2,000 calls to the hotline, with many calls notably referencing enforcement actions carried out by masked men.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings of Fact and Rulings of Law, Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 52(A), Am. Assoc. of Univ. Professors v. Rubio, No. 25-CV-19685, Dkt. No. 261, at 98 (D. Mass. Sep. 30, 2025), <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/69784731/261/american-association-of-university-professors-v-rubio/>.

<sup>2</sup> US Immigration Policy Center, “Accountability, and Oversight of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE): Public Safety Benefits of Unmasking, Body-Worn Cameras, and Identification,” Feb. 10, 2026 (“USIPC Report”).

For example, in December 2025, We Are CASA received a call on our raid tip hotline from a young person near the Eastern Shore whose father had been attacked and detained. He reported that a group of six masked men tackled his father to the ground before his eyes. His father was taken away, and the caller did not know where his father was being taken.

In January 2026 in Silver Spring, four men in masks and hooded sweatshirts emerged from unmarked vehicles and tackled a man on the sidewalk, using a taser on him so that he collapsed to the ground.

In October 2025, We Are CASA received a call from a distressed mother in Hyattsville explaining that she, her husband, and her children made a stop while driving. While they were stopped, three unmarked vehicles approached their vehicle, and a group of masked men emerged. Her husband was taken by these masked men in front of her children.

The public reasonably expects law enforcement to be identifiable: 91% of people are more likely to seek help from an unmasked officer, and 93% are more likely to trust unmasked officers to comply with the law.<sup>3</sup> When a community member is taken by masked individuals in unmarked vehicles at gunpoint, they and their families have no way of knowing who is taking them, where they are going, or why. In addition to instilling fear, the practice erodes the trust of community members in law enforcement and in our legal system.

### **B. Masked law enforcement puts vulnerable communities at heightened risk of serious crime.**

Masked law enforcement puts already vulnerable communities at heightened risk of serious crime. Right now, plainclothes, masked individuals are attacking individuals on our public streets and throwing them into unmarked vehicles.

Predictably, there have now been multiple documented instances of criminals impersonating ICE and kidnapping or assaulting unsuspecting victims.<sup>4</sup> In fact, 78% of people report believing that masked officers are more likely to be impersonators.<sup>5</sup> These instances are likely to continue so long as the practice goes unchecked. Even the FBI has said so: in a bulletin released last fall, it recounted multiple instances of impersonation crimes, and urged law enforcement agencies to cease concealing their identities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Lisa Desjardins & Andrew Corkery, Rise of ICE Agents Wearing Masks Creates Opportunity for Imposters to Conduct Crimes, PBS News (July 27, 2025, at 17:35 ET), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/rise-of-ice-agents-wearing-masks-creates-opportunity-for-imposters-to-conduct-crimes>; Artemis Moshtaghian, Gloria Pazmino & Nick Valencia, Multiple ICE Impersonation Arrests Made During Nationwide Immigration Crackdown, CNN (Feb. 5, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/04/us/ice-impersonators-on-the-rise-arrests-made-as-authorities-issue-national-warning>.

<sup>5</sup> USIPC Report, *supra* n.2.

<sup>6</sup> See Rebecca Beitsch, "FBI urges ICE to identify themselves as criminals impersonate officers," The Hill, Nov. 5, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/5590694-fbi-ice-masks-dhs/>.

**C. Masking is not necessary to legitimate routine law enforcement.**

Masking is not necessary to carry out enforcement operations. In fact, ICE has been carrying out their duties *unmasked* for decades.

In the narrow circumstances where some sort of face covering may be legitimately necessary to a law enforcement officer's carrying out of their duties (if, for example, hazardous chemicals are present), the bill provides exceptions.

While requiring law enforcement to operate unmasked is just one step necessary to protect our communities, it is a crucial step toward mitigating fear and restoring community trust. Now is the time for Maryland to take decisive action. **We Are CASA urges the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 155.**