

FAVORABLE WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON HB0630

Correctional Services – Immigration Detention Facilities – Original Design & Construction

Submitted by Lorette Vetusi – 3/9/26

My name is Lorette Vetusi and I am a resident of Harford County. I am submitting written testimony in favor of *HB0630 Correctional Services – Immigration Detention Facilities – Original Design and Construction*. I like that this bill builds on and strengthens Maryland’s “Dignity Not Detention” law which was passed in 2021. It would prohibit federal immigration authorities and private contractors from opening and operating immigration detention centers in structures that weren’t originally designed and built for the purpose of housing individuals long-term.

This legislation is immediately needed to prevent the conversion of warehouses and other unsuitable structures in Maryland - like those that have been recently targeted in Williamsport, Hunt Valley and Elkridge - into detention camps. It reinforces the authority of state and local government agencies to regulate land use, enforce zoning regulations, and compel compliance with safety, environmental, and building standards. It also promotes more public transparency on this issue, which is needed to counter the second Trump administration’s attempts to acquire properties and open new immigration detention centers in a rushed and secretive manner.

Repurposing buildings that were not originally designed and zoned to hold large number of detainees for extended periods of time poses potential problems for the local communities in which they are situated. These include infrastructure-related concerns such as water supply, waste management, traffic, security, and the capacity of local emergency services.

Moreover, retrofitting buildings to use as detention centers severely jeopardizes the welfare and safety of those who are placed there. There have been many prisoner reports of squalid, inhumane, and hazardous conditions including poor sanitation and ventilation, physical and sexual abuse, medical neglect and the spread of contagious diseases, intimidation to self-deport, inadequate supplies of food and hygiene products, violations of civil rights, and lack of access to legal counsel, services, and materials. Reports indicate that 32 people died in ICE custody last year, which was the deadliest year for detainee deaths in the US in over two decades, and there have already been 6 reported deaths so far this year. Additionally, ICE officials have been severely restricting the ability of members of Congress to visit and inspect these facilities thereby preventing adequate oversight, accountability, and transparency at a time when they are desperately needed.

More generally speaking, I believe that the Maryland State Legislature needs to do everything in their power to oppose DHS’ cruel mass deportation plans and policies which are based on racial profiling and outrageous quotas. We need to protect and support our immigrant population in Maryland, who contribute immensely to Maryland’s economy and cultural diversity. They also commit crimes at a much lower rate than Americans who were born in this country. Maryland’s immigrants always deserve to be treated with kindness, compassion, respect and dignity.

Please vote favorably on HB0630 to counter the federal government’s attempts to open more inhumane detention centers in our state. Thank you for your work on behalf of all Marylanders.