
TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HOUSE BILL 719
Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement - Prohibition Against Sanctuary
Policies
Judiciary Committee
March 4, 2026

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly opposes HB 719, which would prohibit Maryland and any local government entity in the state from inhibiting state and local government entities from coordinating, communicating, cooperating, and complying with federal immigration services, otherwise known as “Sanctuary Policies.”

Sanctuary policies have a long history of protecting vulnerable people from various forms of political violence. Since the 1990s, sanctuary policies have been implemented to prevent criminal justice systems from overstepping their boundaries to enforce matters of immigration law.¹ Many existing sanctuary policies in Maryland allow jurisdictions the right to not enforce immigrant detainees from the Department of Homeland Security –therefore allowing targeted individuals to keep their Fourth Amendment rights, while other policies limit the ability of jurisdiction officials to share immigration related information with federal agents.²

Ending sanctuary protections under HB 719 would undermine community trust in institutions and pose public health concerns. Research on the implementation of Secure Communities immigration enforcement program observed a near 17% decline in health care visits among Hispanic immigrants, due to fear of enforcement.³ Avoidance of health care services, especially routine and preventative care, is linked to delayed management of chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, lower rates of cancer screenings and vaccinations, and increased risk of untreated infections.⁴ These unchecked conditions lead to poorer long-term health outcomes, which can increase utilization of Maryland’s emergency services, and dramatically increase uncompensated care costs. HB 719 would likely produce similar outcomes, discouraging immigrant communities from seeking care and eroding trust in healthcare institutions.

HB 719 is framed as a public safety measure, but it contradicts growing research that sanctuary policies do not increase crime, and immigration enforcement does not reduce it. In one study, crime rates were examined across jurisdictions with and without sanctuary policies. The data display no association between these policies and higher levels of violent or property crime, with some analyses even showing modest reductions for certain offenses.⁵ Another study examined the Secure Communities immigration enforcement program, which expanded cooperation between local law enforcement and immigrant enforcement. The study found that reporting by Hispanic victims of crimes

dropped by around 30%, while victimization increased.⁶ This means that Hispanic victims were significantly less likely to report crimes to the police after the program was implemented. Such studies reinforce the danger that immigration enforcement poses to the public safety and public health of Maryland communities.

Prohibiting sanctuary policies in Maryland would further destroy the safety of our immigrant population in a time when it is extremely unsafe to hold immigrant status in this country.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges an unfavorable report on HB 719.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

¹ Maryland Immigrant Rights coalition.
<https://marylandimmigrantrightscoalition.org/resources/resources-on-sanctuary-policies/>

² Maryland Immigrant Rights coalition.
<https://marylandimmigrantrightscoalition.org/resources/resources-on-sanctuary-policies/>

³ Herring, A., & Barnow, B. S. (2025). Indirect effects of immigration enforcement on health care utilization among lawfully present older Hispanics. *Social Science & Medicine*, 325, 115-134.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.115134>

⁴ Ortega, A. N., Rodriguez, H. P., & Bustamante, A. V. (2023). Avoidance of public programs and delayed care among low-income immigrants: Evidence from the California Health Interview Survey. *PLOS ONE*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9856315/>

⁵ Otsu, Y. (2020). Sanctuary cities and crime (SSRN Working Paper No. 3557558). Social Science Research Network. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3557558>

⁶ Gonçalves, F. M., Jácome, E., & Weisburst, E. K. (2024). Immigration enforcement and public safety (NBER Working Paper No. 32109). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w32109>