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TO: Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Maryland House of Delegates

RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill [HB0630] - Correctional Services
Immigration Detention Facilities - Original Design and Construction

Dear Chair and members of the Maryland House Judiciary Committee,

I am a Maryland citizen, inspired by Project Salt Box (a coalition of Maryland citizens who track how the federal government spends money on immigration detention) to submit this letter. I am horrified at the inhumane treatment of undocumented immigrants that the acquisition of these warehouses represents across the country, and I am writing in support of House Bill 630, which will require that detention facilities operate only in buildings specifically constructed for that purpose.

Since January, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has spent \$631.3 million on warehouses across America. Originally built to store consumer goods, these structures are now being converted to hold people. Eight communities have successfully refused them; Nine warehouses have been purchased. Nine more remain for sale. Collectively, the facilities already sold could detain 41,500 people, at an estimated cost of over \$650 million per year while draining over \$3.1 million from local property tax revenues.

Maryland failed to stop the purchase in Washington County — not for lack of will, but for lack of warning. DHS paid \$102.4 million for a Williamsport warehouse with no plumbing, electrical systems, or water infrastructure designed for human habitation. The sale was finalized without public notice. By the time the community learned of it, the transaction was complete. Washington County, where one in eight residents lives in poverty, lost \$300,000 in annual tax revenue. Elkridge nearly met the same fate before the county council intervened. We know the reality of these “warehouses” because we have seen how DHS operates them already.

In McAllen, Texas, the 77,000-square-foot “Ursula” facility serves as a grim blueprint for what is to come in Maryland. In 2019, Dr. Dolly Lucio Sevier — a pediatrician who examined children detained at Ursula — documented conditions there resembling torture. Extreme cold, constant light, and children held in chain-link cages on concrete floors. The DHS Office of Inspector General confirmed that squalor, observing cells built for 35 people holding 155, detainees standing on toilets just to breathe, and infants whose mothers could not wash their bottles.

At the Fallon building here in Baltimore, recently leaked video shows detainees packed shoulder-to-shoulder in rooms unfit for use. DHS's lack of human rights and dignity is clear. The only question is whether we will permit it to expand.

The urgency to act now has only increased. Today, the federal government awarded contracts Sunday to renovate two warehouses, each designed to hold 1,500 people, into immigration detention and processing facilities in Maryland and Arizona, according to contract records. The Maryland facility is scheduled for completion by May; the Arizona contract runs through March 2027. And recently, GEO Group — DHS's largest private detention contractor — was added to the WEXMAC TITUS contract, a Department of Defense procurement vehicle. Unlike DHS purchases, DoD contracts bypass standard oversight and public notice. What happened in Williamsport can now happen faster and in total secrecy. GEO Group can now acquire Maryland warehouses using military authorities never intended for domestic detention.

House Bill 630 responds to this bypass.

The bill requires that detention facilities operate only in buildings specifically constructed for that purpose. Regardless of the federal agency or the procurement vehicle used, Maryland must maintain standards for what operates within its borders.

Working in tandem with the Dignity Not Detention Act, HB 630 ensures that any facility — federal or private — meets basic human habitation standards. It prevents Maryland from becoming a staging ground for “makeshift” prisons that fail the minimum standards of decency. This is not a radical proposal. It is a defense of fundamental human rights. Eight communities have already rejected these sales. House Bill 630 gives Maryland the tools we lacked in Williamsport to safeguard our residents when the federal government acts without consultation. Without this bill, we have no recourse when the next warehouse is purchased through DoD channels.

You must decide what Maryland will tolerate. Will we allow people to be stored as freight, or will we insist on basic human standards? History will record what we permitted and what we refused.

Pass House Bill 630. Establish that Maryland requires detention facilities to be built for humans, not improvised from industrial shells. Spare us the necessity of fighting these sales facility-by-facility. Spare us our own Ursula.