



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Testimony on House Bill 444 – Favorable HB444 – Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition House Judiciary Committee January 27, 2026

TO: J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair, Del. Dera Davis, Vice Chair and the members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Member – Maryland Public Policy Network

DATE: January 27, 2025

I support **HB444** because immigration enforcement agreements like 287(g) create fear in immigrant communities and undermine public safety for everyone. When people fear contact with law enforcement, they are less likely to report crimes, seek help, or cooperate as witnesses—even when they are victims. They are less likely to attend worship services, seek medical care, go to the library, do volunteer work, or support local businesses.

Programs like 287(g) have been associated with racial profiling, discrimination, and wrongful detention. They divert local resources away from protecting communities and instead entangle local agencies in federal deportation efforts that separate families and destabilize neighborhoods.

Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe said that in God's kingdom, immigrants and refugees are not at the edges, fearful and alone, but are the very center of God's story. "We believe their struggles reveal the heart of God, and we cannot be a true community if some among us live in fear," he said. "We are seeking the ability to fully gather and follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves."

Episcopal congregations across the State have already seen decreased attendance at worship services and social service ministries due to fears of ICE actions. In some places, even congregants with documented legal status are choosing to stay home for fear they may be mistakenly arrested based on their appearance.

Welcoming the stranger is not a political act—it's a sacred obligation. When immigrants walk through our church doors, they're not entering as outsiders; they are stepping into the heart of our faith, where their dignity and stories are embraced as



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reflections of God's love. Our objection to this bill is about protecting our ability to live out the Gospel without fear or interference.

"We are told by the rulers of our day that the rich shall be first; that compassion is a weakness; that we should regard the migrants and strangers among us with fear and contempt," Bishop Rowe said. "But I ask us all to see that our true citizenship is in God's kingdom, where the meek shall inherit the earth, the merciful shall receive mercy, and the captives shall go free."

I request a favorable report.