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Kathryn S. Wenner
Kensington, Maryland 20895

TESTIMONY ON HB444 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement Agreements - Prohibition

TO: Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Kathryn S. Wenner

My name is Kathryn Wenner. I am a resident of District 18. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB444, Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement Agreements - Prohibition.

I am a retired journalist with decades of involvement in coverage from the world's most dire zones of conflict and human suffering. My awareness of the safety and cleanliness and security of my life as an American began as a 7-year-old in impoverished South Korea, where I lived a few thousand yards from children my own age in tar-paper shacks. When Vietnamese who escaped after the fall of Saigon began arriving in large numbers in my hometown of Arlington, Virginia, I rejoiced. Years later, when the apartment buildings on my Arlington street filled with people who had fled the violence in El Salvador and Guatemala, I felt joy every day that my country was able to offer them a place to live in dignity and safety.

And now I feel again the pride that comes from living in a state where my elected officials have the opportunity to do what must be done in the name of humanity and our American values to protect and defend our immigrant neighbors and friends, by enacting HB444.

I know what it feels like to fear law enforcement and armed soldiers on the streets, because I spent time in Myanmar, where you were careful to stay in line lest you be thrown in prison. Until now in this country, I have never feared seeking help and protection from local law enforcement officers. If HB444 does not pass, I will no longer be able to say that. Federal officials are already seeking to criminalize the actions of American citizens like myself who oppose the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers on our streets.

As we witness and experience immigrant members of our communities coming under attack by federal officials, we are counting on the Maryland State Legislature to act swiftly in response.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB444.