



To: Chair and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Taj Smith, President of the Washington County NAACP

Date: January 23, 2026

Re: Support for HB444 - Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement Agreements (Maryland Trust Act)

Written Testimony of Taj Smith

My name is Taj Smith and I serve as President of the Washington County NAACP. On behalf of our members and the communities we serve, I am submitting this written testimony to express our unwavering support for HB444.

While I am not appearing before you in person today, the urgency of this bill for Washington County cannot be overstated. We are currently witnessing a dangerous intersection of local law enforcement, federal overreach, and extremist political agendas that threaten the civil rights of every resident of our county.

While a local officer cannot legally hold someone solely for being undocumented, a 287(g) agreement deputizes local law enforcement to act as federal immigration agents. Officers can detain individuals based on a mere belief that they are unlawfully present. These agreements create a gateway to systemic racial profiling in policing. If I looked Irish or Russian, for example, I would be significantly less likely to end up in a county detention center following a routine police interaction.

Washington County entered into its 287(g) agreement with the explicit promise of "public safety." However, the data reveals a different story. These agreements are not catching "violent criminals." Instead, they serve as a trap for those of us who "look" like immigrants.

Data indicates that a significant percentage of ICE detainees are issued for individuals whose original "crime" was a non-violent traffic violation. Nationally, and within Maryland, statistics show that over 50% of individuals flagged through 287(g) programs have no prior criminal record or were arrested for minor misdemeanors. These agreements shift the financial burden of federal immigration enforcement onto local taxpayers while simultaneously eroding the trust between the community and the police.

NAACP President & CEO Derrick Johnson recently stated that our democracy is undergoing a "stress test." Racial profiling is a direct violation of our Constitution. Due process and equal protection must apply to every person who sets foot on this land. When we target people because they don't "look" like a citizen, we aren't enforcing the law, we are violating it!

We live in a rural county where racism is a daily reality. I am a natural-born citizen, but because I am Black, have what some consider a "Muslim name," and may look Hispanic, I, like many others, am a target of the profiling these agreements create.

The threat in Washington County is real. One of our county commissioners contributed to the extremist agenda of Project 2025. Reports from January indicate that federal and elected county officials are considering placing an ICE processing warehouse in our county. The suspected facility is not zoned for habitation and intended to hold up to 1,500 people. This

is not a coincidence; it is a coordinated effort. Commissioner Derek Harvey's background as a federal intelligence advisor and his ties to the architects of the current administration's mass detention plans, suggests a direct bridge between our local governments and this federal expansion. Furthermore, Hagerstown Regional Airport (HGR) can be positioned as ICE Air transport. Our county is effectively volunteering to be the transit hub for a system that bypasses due process and prioritizes the human trafficking and detainment of immigrant communities.

When extremism holds positions of power, including within our law enforcement, our communities of color live in a state of constant fear. If HB444 is not passed, our local law enforcement and infrastructure will continue to be used as the front-end intake for this administration's machinery of fear.

You were elected to protect everyone who lives and works in your districts. Passing HB444 is your opportunity and your duty, to uphold the human rights of our immigrant neighbors and the constitutional rights of us all. We must end these state-sanctioned profiling mechanisms that tear families apart and target Black and Brown bodies under the guise of "public safety"

We urge you to issue a favorable report for HB444.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Taj Smith', written over a horizontal line.

Taj Smith, President, Washington County NAACP
tajsmith.naACP@gmail.com