



Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 903

SB903: Immigration Enforcement - Public Schools, Hospitals and Courthouses - Policies
Michelle LaRue, M.D., On Behalf of CASA de Maryland, Inc.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 26, 2020

To Honorable Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of the CASA, I, Michelle LaRue, M.D., Senior Manager of Health and Human Services, am pleased to offer favorable testimony regarding Senate Bill 903 (Immigration Enforcement – Public Schools, Hospitals, and Courthouses - Policies).

CASA is the largest membership based immigrant advocacy and services organization in the region with approximately 100,000 members across the state. CASA provides a variety of services that range from public health outreach and education awareness campaigns, system navigation, and enrollment in health insurance and social services. Our interaction with thousands of community members through these programs gives our organization a unique framework of understanding how critical it is that immigrant families and all individuals have access to sensitive public spaces.

With the Trump administration adopting strong anti-immigrant philosophies and the federal government enforcing systemic attacks on immigrants across the country, we have seen an increase of fear in immigrant communities across Maryland. Our offices have seen firsthand, an active disenrollment of fully eligible community members in a variety of health and social services including unenrolling children from Medicaid, unenrolling children from free and reduced lunch programs, families going months or years without check-ups, management of chronic conditions, and routine screenings - all as a direct result of their fear of ICE being present in these spaces.

House Bill 403 would tackle the crucial issue that immigrants are facing everyday: choosing between their health and being separated from their family. By creating guidance on ICE entry to hospitals, and other sensitive locations like schools and hospitals, it protects families from not only putting their own health at risk, but also but the health of other Maryland residents at risk. Although ICE currently has policies against entering these spaces, it is not enforced. This passage of this bill would ensure that the state is doing its job in protecting all residents, as it ensures that families can enter, exit, and use the services at schools, hospitals, and courthouses across the state safely.

As a physician of over 15 years, I can attest to the fact that there is nothing paramount to our ability to save lives, as the trust that patients bestow on us as physicians and on our facilities to care for them and their loved ones compares to nothing. When a patient is rushed to the emergency room, doctors could care less about their ability to pay, whether they are insured or uninsured, if they are a victim or a perpetrator of an accident, or if they are an immigrant or not – all doctors care saving the precious life in front of us. When people are too afraid to come to the hospital, it means that a precious life is at risk.

Medical studies continue to show us that large percentages of immigrants are missing appointments, scheduling fewer visits, and missing irreplaceable time with their loved ones that are undergoing long-term treatment. Aside from the moral argument, that we have a responsibility to care for one another, it is also an enormous risk to the general community when people don't get their routine preventable interventions such as flu shots and vaccinations. Additionally, delays in treatment lead to economic consequences for the community, as it causes individuals to be absent for work for longer periods of time - and drastically increases the cost of care because conditions are more advanced.

Furthermore, we have seen cases across the country of heart-wrenching and inhumane ways that immigration agents have interfered with medical treatment including ICE detaining individuals who have attempted to help loved ones seek medical attention, immigration officers detaining individuals in ambulances in the midst of a medical emergency, and a young 10-year-old individual who woke up from a painful surgery in custody, instead of with family. Our fear is that similar scenarios will occur in Maryland without the passage of this important bill. Members of CASA fear the same.

I, like many doctors, chose this profession to heal people - regardless of their immigration status. Many hospitals across the country have taken a stand in implementing policies to protect all patients and it is our strong belief that the state must follow the recommendation of doctors from across the country in making it law to have these policies in place. This legislation will be a significant step in achieving safety for CASA members and all members of the Maryland community.

Thank you for your consideration on this bill. **CASA strongly supports SB903 and urges a favorable report from the committee.** Please contact our office with any questions or requests for further commentary.

