



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Shared voices for liberal religious values in Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 388 Criminal Procedure – Civil Immigration Enforcement - Restrictions

To: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Jim Caldiero, co-Chair, Immigration Task Force, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Date: February 11, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 388.

As a Unitarian Universalist (UU) and chair of the Immigration Task Force of the UU Legislative Ministry of Maryland which is a faith-based organization that seeks to engage the 4000+ UU's in 26 congregations throughout our state in advocating for our values and principles of the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity and compassion in human relations, I am compelled to encourage you to vote in favor of the subject bill that will prohibit the use of local law enforcement resources in civil immigration enforcement.

Perhaps the best argument is to tell you about Charley. I met Charley several months ago.

Charley is not his real name. As with most immigrants, fear envelops Charley's life, so no real names, no videos or films in which gangs can recognize him.

Charley came to the U.S. from a Central American country with his mother when he was 6 years old. We might call him a Dreamer. His childhood was uneventful. During his teen years, however, his life turned upside down. After a violent altercation with his stepfather, Charley, age 15, was arrested, jailed and subsequently deported, despite his protestations of "credible fear" of violence if returned to a Central American country he barely knew.

After a year, Charley had saved enough money to travel to Mexico and re-enter the U.S. at the California border. For the next 10 years, Charley integrated himself into American life, began a family, worked and paid taxes. Then, a routine encounter with police who became suspicious of his name led to his detention and a subsequent call to ICE which took Charley into custody.

Charley was shunted to various ICE detention centers, many privately run under contract with companies such as Immigration Centers of America (ICA) which is trying to build a 600-bed center in Maryland within 50 miles of ICE's Baltimore Field Office. Charley ended up at the ICE Detention Center in Jessup, MD, a part of the Howard County Department of Corrections facility that the County rents to ICE under an Intergovernmental Service Agreement where ICE pays the county a lucrative per diem rate for each of the 100+ immigrant detainees.

Charley and all the undocumented immigrant young men held in the detention center are housed in “general population” dormitories along with gang members. The immigrants, most of whom are non-violent, are faced with two choices: join a gang for protection – begin a life of crime, the very event we are trying to prevent – or be beaten by gang members. Charley didn’t join a gang and was beaten. Guards, who don’t speak Spanish, seeing Charley’s bloodied and bruised body, concluded he had been fighting and placed him in segregation/isolation, a mixed blessing. At least he was safe from the gangs, but alone in a small, dark, windowless cell for 23 hours a day, with only one hour outside for exercise and phone calls to family and lawyers. The facility does not provide counseling or mental health support that the most vulnerable detainees need. There are few books and nearly none in Spanish. Only one television and gangs dominate the programming. Families, if local, don’t visit because they are afraid of ICE.

Fortunately, a non-profit organization took on Charley’s case. An immigration judge ruled that Charley’s original deportation was unjust because of “credible fear” in returning to Central America and so his re-entry violation was consequently invalid. Charley was granted asylum. He has graduated from a trade school, obtained a driver’s license and is reconnecting with his family. He wants to become a lawfully admitted permanent resident (Green Card) and eventually to become a U.S. Citizen. After all, the United States is really the only home he knows.

Had HB 388 been Maryland law, the local police officers who transferred Charley to ICE would have been prohibited from calling ICE and Charley would never have had to face the violence of ICE detention, suffer beatings by gang members or the inhumane indignity of isolation.

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt succinctly described why our parents and grandparents were fighting and dying thousands of miles from our shores. He asserted Four Freedoms—Freedom from Want, Freedom to Worship, Freedom of Speech and Freedom from Fear. Today, Freedom from Fear, which should apply to all who live here regardless of race, creed, national origin, sexual orientation and immigration status is under threat. Fear is pervasive among our immigrant communities—fear of taking a sick child to an emergency room and fear of a pregnant woman going to hospital because a nurse may call ICE, fear of reporting domestic abuse because a police officer may call ICE.

We can end the fear. Please vote in favor of HB 388.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jim Caldiero

Co-Chair, Immigration Task Force, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

4128 Lotus Circle

Ellicott City, MD 21043-4873

Tel: (L) 410-465-7452; (M) 443-520-1568

Email: jimcal87@gmail.com