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Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Chapter of Doctors for America strongly supports HB 677. We are part of the national Doctors for America organization which is a national non-partisan organization of over 18,000 physicians, medical students, trainees, advocates, and other health care professionals from all specialties committed to making care more accessible and affordable for our patients. Those members, including the 800 members in Maryland, oppose inhumane detention of migrants and refugees attempting to enter the United States.

As physicians and medical students, we know all too well the physical danger and psychological trauma that immigration detention poses to the people who are detained as well as to their families. When immigrants are detained either in government prisons or in for-profit detention facilities, their physical and psychological health suffers. There are well-documented cases of untreated infection, withholding of necessary medications for diseases both acute and chronic, a lack of prenatal care for women who are pregnant, even reports of rampant physical and sexual assault. The trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder rates in migrants as a result of their detention and separation often surpass the effects of the conditions that may have driven them to migrate in the first place. Multiple suicides have been documented or suspected in these facilities, nationwide and in Maryland.

Among the goals of HB 677 is to put an end to the IGSA that provides a profit motivation for local jurisdictions to cooperate with agencies engaged in this detention, a motivation that we suspect encourages those managing the detention of migrants to ignore the medical needs of their detainees. The case of ICA, the for-profit prison corporation that is angling to build in Maryland, is illustrative in this regard. ICA has a well-documented history of denying medically necessary care to those in their facilities, leading to public health risks including outbreaks of diseases such as mumps and chicken pox that are easily (and inexpensively) prevented but can be devastating if untreated. This is not to even attempt to quantify the psychological suffering these inmates experience in these facilities.

As physicians and those in training, we know that suffering of these detained migrants has ripple effects on their families and communities, creating secondary trauma. Families lose the social and financial support of a parent, brother, sister, or spouse. Children are subjected to the loss of a parent or older sibling, resulting depression and anxiety about what their family member is experiencing, an inability to sleep, loss of productivity at work or school, and depressed immune defenses leading to increased disease susceptibility.

Every day that goes by brings more suffering and illness in detainees, up to and including death by suicide, and more financial and structural instability for families and communities. The sooner this bill is passed, the better. It is for this reason that we strongly urge a favorable report on HB 677.

Yours sincerely,

Doctors for America is a 501(c)(3) national movement that mobilizes physicians and medical students to put patients over politics on the pressing issues of the day to improve the health of our patients, communities, and nation.