



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah
President/CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Email: kvignarajah@lirs.org Office: (410) 230-2762

HB 677
“Dignity, not Detention Act” (Support)
Judiciary Committee
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Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) respectfully submits this written testimony in support of the “Dignity, not Detention Act.” LIRS is a national non-profit faith-based organization, based in Baltimore with over 80-years of experience working with vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and children to ensure that they are welcomed, protected and informed of their legal rights. We support HB 677, “Dignity, not Detention Act,” because we know from our direct involvement in Alternatives to Detention (ATD) programs that there are better ways to support immigrants and local communities and uphold American values.

Since the 1990s, LIRS has been heavily engaged in advocating for and piloting community-based ATD models in the United States for migrants and asylum seekers. We know first-hand that community based ATD programs are the best and most appropriate way to meet the social service needs of the vulnerable communities we serve and orient them to our complex immigration legal system, so that they attend immigration appointments and hearings.

Despite overwhelming evidence of mistreatment of asylees, poor sanitary conditions, and skyrocketing costs, the immigration prison industry has increased dramatically in the past two years. In early 2017, the average daily population of immigrant detainees was 39,000 nationally and it rose to [52,000](#) in May of 2019. [71%](#) of these immigrants detained are held in private prisons. The private prison industry is [dominated by two companies-Geo and Corecivic Group](#), as they receive the majority of government contracts. In 2018, CoreCivic, for instance, reported [\\$1.83 billion in revenue](#), almost half of which came from federal contracts with U.S. Marshals,

the Bureau of Prisons — which also holds detained immigrants — and ICE. Geo and CoreCivic projected a [\\$2.49 billion](#) and \$1.9 billion revenue for 2019

What is deeply troublesome is that our tax dollars are being wasted on funding private prison companies versus ATD which cost less and obtain exceptional results. In 2018, according to federal government data, [it cost \\$149.58 taxpayer dollars](#) to detain one person for one day in a privately-run immigrant prison. By comparison, in 2018 the Department of Homeland Security, estimated that the average cost per ATD participant would be [\\$4.50 per day](#). With alternatives to detention the taxpayer saves \$145.08 per person per day and we don't have to compromise our values on being the welcoming nation that we are.

ATD programs are also a more humane option compared to incarceration. At a much lower cost, asylum seekers enrolled in ATD programs receive a case manager that welcomes asylees with kindness, creates individualized trauma care plans and advises asylees of their legal rights and obligations while in the United States. Private prisons, on the other hand, detain asylees in order to increase their profit margins, and have little incentive to provide humanitarian assistance.

In 2015, LIRS designed [Family Placement Alternatives](#) as a small pilot program, to provide community-based case management services to families leaving immigration detention. The Family Placement Alternatives (FPA) pilot program proved that if families released from detention are provided case management, legal and social support, have their basic needs met, and are provided with orientation to their immigration release terms, they will comply with their immigration requirements. For instance, out of the families we helped:

- 100% fully complied with their immigration obligations during the program.
- 80% secured legal representation
- 70% received referrals for therapy or other mental health services

LIRS also participated in a larger Family Case Management program (FCMP) (2015-2017) - an ATD program funded by the federal government that helped families by providing community-

based resources, instead of detention. The FCMP was ended by the Federal Government in 2017, but it's results were positive, with about [99 percent of all migrants](#) in the program made it to their ICE-ERO check-ins, [100](#) percent made it to their court appearances.

LIRS supports the "Dignity, not Detention Act," because it aptly recognizes that privately run immigration detention centers are ill-equipped to care for asylum seekers and other persons fleeing persecution. Imprisoning asylum seekers in privately run detention centers is illogical when there are ATD programs that are more humane and beneficial to asylum seekers, local communities and the government. Private detention must end. With our wealth of expertise in ATD, LIRS can confidently claim that-ATD not privately-run prisons are a more humane and cost-effective means of helping vulnerable and traumatized immigrants. LIRS would like to see Maryland, like California, Washington, New York and Illinois, take the lead in safeguarding American values and protecting the most vulnerable, by banning private immigration prisons in the state.

Best regards,

Krish O' Mara Vignarajah
President & CEO