

**Statement of
Jesse Franzblau, Senior Policy Analyst
National Immigrant Justice Center**

**Maryland House of Delegates, Judiciary Committee
HB 677 – Support
Correctional Services, - Immigration Detention – Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)**

February 25, 2020

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jesse Franzblau; I am a Senior Policy Analyst at the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC). On behalf of my colleagues, and the thousands of individuals NIJC serves every year, I am here to express our strong support for HB 677, the Dignity Not Detention Act.

For over three decades, NIJC has dedicated itself to ensuring human rights protections and access to justice for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. NIJC provides direct legal services to and advocates for these populations through policy reform, impact litigation, and public education. NIJC provides legal services to more than 10,000 low-income individuals each year. NIJC also monitors abuses in the federal immigration detention system, while serving as a primary *pro bono* legal service provider for detained immigrants. NIJC submits this written statement to inform you that the Dignity Not Detention Act is a timely and vitally important measure to protect Maryland residents.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a Request for Information (RFI) in April 2019 to identify one or more possible immigration detention facility sites within a desired 50-mile radius of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Baltimore Field Office. The RFI called for a facility of approximately 600-800 adult males and females.¹ In response, the private company Immigration Centers of America (ICA) submitted a conceptual site plan and 14-page packet of information for an 800-bed facility. The company's packet was redacted, but a three-page cover letter offered a glowing account of the private immigrant detention facility that ICA runs with ICE with 700 beds in Farmville, Virginia, and expressed interest in creating a similar operation in Maryland.² Importantly, no local governments in Maryland responded to the RFI expressing interest in hosting the new ICE facility in their town or county.

The Virginia-based company, ICA, hired the Annapolis-based consultancy firm Cornerstone Government Affairs to lobby officials in Queen Anne's County to take on the new facility. Cornerstone lobbyists then went to the town of Sudlersville in an effort to convince local

¹ Request for Information (RFI), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), *Immigration Detention Services – Maryland Detention Capability*, April 2019, <https://cutt.ly/CrML3uA>.

² Lilian Reed, "ICE published an ad looking for interest in building a Baltimore detention facility. Here's who answered," The Baltimore Sun, August 1, 2019, shorturl.at/rAM38.

A spectrum of alternatives to detention (ATDs), including parole, affordable bond, community-based support programs and regular check-ins, has long existed as a better option to the mass incarceration of immigrants.¹⁷ At this moment, ICE is detaining nearly 40,000 people every day in its jails and private prisons. That represents a steep growth of the detention system from the average of just over 34,000 people in 2016.¹⁸ Moves to expand this already bloated system are an insult to our national values and to the taxpayer's wallet.

The National Immigrant Justice Center is unequivocally opposed to the expansion of immigration detention in Maryland and elsewhere. We urge you to support the Dignity not Detention Act to ensure that Maryland does not participate in this or any administration's assault on immigrant families.

Please direct any response or inquiries to:

Jesse Franzblau, NIJC Senior Policy Analyst, mflaming@heartlandalliance.org
Mark Fleming, NIJC Associate Director of Litigation, mflaming@heartlandalliance.org
Heidi Altman, NIJC Policy Director, haltman@heartlandalliance.org

¹⁷ For a review of the existing literature on ATDs, *see* American Immigration Lawyers Association *et al.*, "The Real Alternatives to Detention," June 27, 2017, [shorturl.at/iGKL3](https://www.aiala.org/shorturl.at/iGKL3).

¹⁸ Heidi Altman, "DHS's Secret Detention Expansion Is Dangerous For Immigrants, And Democracy," National Immigrant Justice Center, January 10, 2019, [shorturl.at/emFR5](https://www.nijc.org/shorturl.at/emFR5).