



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Shared Voices for Liberal Religious Values in Maryland

Testimony in Support of SB 478 - Correctional Services – Immigration Detention – Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)

To: Senator William Smith, Jr., Chair, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings
Committee

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

Date: February 10, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB 478 which bans any new contracts or renewals of existing contracts with detention facilities operated wholly (or in part by) private corporations; ensures that the public is adequately informed in any plans for a new private detention facility to take place; requires local entities that already have an existing immigration detention agreement (Intergovernmental Service Agreement or IGSA) to terminate the contract by October 1, 2022. Last session the bill was introduced as SB 850/HB 677

Detention in these facilities is deadly. Twenty-six immigrant detainees have died while in ICE custody under the Trump administration, fifty-six have died during the Obama administration. (before COVID-19); See the report, [Fatal Neglect, How ICE Ignores Deaths in Detention](#). The death toll has only been rising during the pandemic with reports from all over the country of substandard medical care and more. Despite ICE's mean daily detained population decreasing significantly, the COVID-19 case rate among detainees was on average more than 13 times the rate of the US population. ICE data shows a total of 7,292 confirmed coronavirus cases among detainees with outbreaks happening in detention centers all over the country such as the center in Farmville, VA. That has led to the death of at least one person, with more than 250 people infected with COVID-19.

As you may be aware, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has IGSA's with three county detention centers – Frederick, Howard and Worcester. These counties are profiting from the inhumane and immoral detention of individuals who in most cases have committed only civil immigration violations.

I am sure that you are aware of the recent Washington Post article that detailed a DHS Inspector General report about the state of the Detention Center in Jessup, Howard County. My Unitarian Universalist faith calls me to respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to promote and affirm justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Surely, these values are embraced by all the citizens of Maryland and its

UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,

www.uulmmd.org info@uulmmd.org www.facebook.com/uulmmd [www.Twitter.com/uulmmd](https://www.twitter.com/uulmmd)

government which have a long history of supporting and protecting human rights. By enacting SB 478, we can ensure fair and safe treatment for all our neighbors.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 478

Thank you for your consideration.

Jim Caldiero

Ellicott City, MD 21043

Email: immigration@uulmmd.org

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland, 333 Dubois Rd., Annapolis, MD 21401, (410) 266-8044, info@uulmmd.org

Sources:

Fatal Neglect.

<https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/reports/Fatal%20Neglect%20A%20CLU-DWN-NIJC.pdf>

7,292 Confirmed Covid-19 Cases. <https://www.ice.gov/coronavirus#citations>

Outbreak in Farmville.

<https://prospect.org/justice/farmville-ice-facility-almost-every-detainee-has-coronavirus/>

DHS IG Report, Jessup Detention Center,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/ice-immigrant-detainees-strip-search/2020/10/30/f5a68d00-1aa1-11eb-bb35-2dcfdab0a345_story.html

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