

Arielle Juberg
Baltimore, Maryland
District 8

Testimony in Support of Bill SB478, Correctional Services – Immigration Detention – Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)

To: Chair Smith and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Arielle Juberg

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice in Baltimore and Casa de Maryland's Ally Network. I am testifying in support of SB478, Correctional Services – Immigration Detention – Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act).

I ask that you follow your conscious to stop new private immigration detention centers in Maryland and end Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSA) between ICE and local jurisdictions. My request rests on two often-competing principles: profit and basic human rights.

Profit is the elephant in the room for this bill. The private companies that build immigrant detention centers are profit-driven. They are motivated to make a profit for the company and, if applicable, shareholders. These companies have an ingrained interest in detaining more men and women to maximize profits. Unlike other companies, they aren't focused on providing a product, improving our communities, or making society more efficient. The other aspect of profit is the funds received by jurisdictions participating in IGSA's. While it is true that these jurisdictions receive hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars through IGSA's, these are actually a small percentage of total revenue for each county.

The presence of new private immigration detention centers in Maryland would dishonor our state. Time and time again, these centers have disregarded people's basic human rights. This has been clearly shown during the COVID-19 pandemic. ICE-Farmville, a private detention center in Farmville, Virginia, has had one of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks in the country, with reports saying that approximately 90 percent of the detained people have tested positive.¹ This outbreak is not a fluke or a series of bad luck – it is a direct outcome of the decisions made by Farmville's management. Detained individuals cannot socially distance, and sick detainees have been denied medical care. At least one detained man in Farmville is reported to have died of COVID-19.¹

The current immigration detention situation in Maryland reminds me of another time in our history. Before the Civil War, free African Americans and enslaved persons who had escaped were often captured in Maryland and sold south. This practice made several Marylanders very wealthy. One hundred and fifty years later, I hope we've moved beyond imprisoning human beings for profit in this state. I respectfully urge a favorable report for SB478.

¹ Gathright, Jenny. "Inspection Finds 'Systematic' Failings In Farmville Immigrant Detention Center Response To COVID-19 Outbreak" WAMU 88.5. <https://wamu.org/story/20/09/10/inspection-finds-systematic-failings-in-farmville-immigrant-detention-center-response-to-covid-19-outbreak/>