

Daniel Gorny

Parkville, MD

District 8

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0478, Dignity Not Detention Act

February 10, 2021

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

FROM: Daniel Gorny

My name is Daniel Gorny. I live in Parkville in District 8, and am a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice. This testimony is in support of Senate Bill 0478. This bill represents far more than support for Maryland's immigrant communities; it represents the state's commitment to respecting basic human dignity and worth. The state cannot allow either private or public organizations to profit from people's lives, or permit private entities to exercise coercive force against members of the public.

The use of privately owned detention centers and paid detention contracts described in the Dignity Not Detention Act commoditizes human life and encourages confinement of individuals and dissolution of families in the name of profit. I have spent most of my career working in private industry at for-profit companies and have seen first hand how quickly working conditions are eroded in order to protect a corporate balance sheet. This race to the bottom in terms of respect is accelerated when a person's only contribution to the bottom line is through being detained. Furthermore, granting coercive powers over individuals to private organizations, which are subject to less oversight and less accountability than public institutions, puts those held in these facilities at greater risk of unwarranted harm.

Immigration detention facilities are used to house individuals awaiting immigrations hearings. These are people who have been accused, not convicted, of committing civil, not criminal, violations. No other civil matter carries a sentence of imprisonment, and yet we are permitting Marylanders to be held hazardous conditions, away from their families, and at the mercy of a system that has come to demonize those who look or speak differently, simply because they have been accused of committing a civil violation.

I have heard from a man who was detained because he was a passenger in a broken-down vehicle that a police officer stopped to assist. I have heard from a man who was detained because he borrowed a vehicle from another man who was suspected of being undocumented. I have heard from a man who was deported without ever speaking to a lawyer or saying goodbye to his wife and children. These actions do not protect society, they traumatize and disrespect human beings.

Private detention facilities and paid detention contracts incentivize the confinement of people like livestock, and their use is unconscionable. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 0478.

Thank you,

Daniel Gorny

Basic human dignity

Do not commoditize human life

Do not permit private exercise of coercive force

Prison conditions pending trial for civil actions

Being passengers in broken downs, borrowing car from wanted person

Profit margins drive race to bottom on conditions

Good/bad immigrant story causes problems

Does not violate federal law or primacy (US v California)