

January 28, 2021

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB234/HB23
Personal Information - State and Local Agencies - Restrictions on Access

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I'm writing in support of SB234. My name is Laura Atwood, and I've lived in Silver Spring (D20) for 21 years. While I'm active in a number of area organizations, I am testifying as an individual.

This letter comes from my perspective working as a home health physical therapist who drives to 5-6 homes in Montgomery County each workday.

Pragmatically speaking, I want safe roads with licensed drivers; a system that encourages this seems like a no-brainer. In 2013, Maryland made driver's licenses available regardless of immigration status, and many other states have done the same. ICE shouldn't be able to undermine what Maryland has wisely set up. When people go through the channels they're supposed to, get licenses, and then have the betrayal of it being used against them--this just discourages them from getting licenses, which surely is not in anyone's interest.

Many people's lives require driving at least some of the time, and I'm sympathetic; public transportation alone would take >11 hours (!) per workday, foul up punctuality, and not allow me to transport my work gear. Yet driving without a license is a serious offense and can be used against people by ICE. But if people can't drive or pay for frequent taxis, many aspects of their life in Maryland are limited: where they can live, where they can work, how much time they spend daily on transportation, what activities their child can participate in, whether they can attend the child's school events, even whether their kid can return to school after a medical appointment versus miss the whole day.

Yet my work is, at its core, about recognizing and supporting my patients' humanity. When I'm invited into each person's home and life, my goal is not to judge, my goal is to connect with each person and work together toward meaningful goals. This spills over: When I walk around or look at the news and lay eyes on any individual, I see someone who could be or have been my patient, someone with dignity and inherent value. I've had patients who were undocumented, patients who were documented and depended on household family who were not, and patients who were documented but whose wonderful private caregivers were not. All were human beings.

We must stop mechanisms that feed ICE detention and deportation, both of which are deadly and destructive for individuals, families, and communities. During this pandemic--which is also central to my work life--we've seen that detention can be fatal; and we know that U.S. deportations spread Covid worldwide. After people are deported, their fates are often not tracked; but organizations that have tried have found that many people are indeed killed soon after. We also know for certain the devastating psychosocial and economic effects of detention and deportation on these human beings' families and communities.

We cannot allow ICE to subvert Maryland's deeply sensible and humane policy on driver's licenses to wreak havoc on people's lives.

I therefore urge a favorable report on SB234.