



SB 478/HB 16 – SUPPORT
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SB 478/HB 16 SUPPORT

Correctional Services – Immigration Detention – Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee/House Judiciary Committee

February 10, 2021

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

As a Maryland resident and on behalf of Maryland Against ICE Detention (MDAID), I urge this committee to report favorably on SB 478/HB 16, the Dignity Not Detention Act.

MDAID is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals striving to stop immigration detention as well as systems that contribute to detention and deportation. We are made up of over 60 organizations and over 200,000 individual members and members of those organizations. We oppose both private and public ICE detention, including the current Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs) in Howard, Frederick, and Worcester Counties that reserve beds for ICE.

Evidence from ICE expansion efforts across the country shows that adding more detention beds results in more community raids (rife with racial profiling and “collateral arrests” of bystanders), more people detained at routine ICE check-ins, and more community members detained for civil violations. The consequences for our communities are severe. Our friends and neighbors, including those who have called Maryland home for decades, live in fear of being detained or deported, forcibly separated from their children, and prevented from supporting their families. This needs to stop.

Some of our members have been inside of ICE detention and know firsthand how detained immigrants are frequently denied medical care. In 2020, 21 people died in ICE custody.

The percentage of immigrant detainees housed in private prisons nationwide has increased steadily in the last decade, now reaching about 70%. A small number of corporations reap tremendous profits through federal contracts. These corporations—including Immigration Centers of America (ICA), which has been seeking to open a detention center in Sudlersville, a town of 400 people in Queen Anne’s county—have a history of maximizing profits at the expense of humane treatment of detainees and fair compensation for employees. ICA’s Farmville, Virginia, Detention Center has been subject to scrutiny over poor medical care, use of force and restraints, lack of religious accommodation, and poor environmental health and safety. In July of 2020, ICA-Farmville was the site of the nation’s largest COVID-19 outbreak in detention, leading directly to the death of James Hill.

This issue has now taken on greater urgency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An ICE jail is the perfect setting for the spread of COVID as people are packed in very close quarters without proper ventilation, face masks, or hygienic conditions in general.

The result is a growing number of immigrants getting sick and dying. Prison staff are also bringing in COVID-19 from the outside, which is resulting in a growing number of deaths of staff members. In turn,



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this accelerates community spread of infection. Immigration detention is then a direct threat to public health.

Numerous state and local governments around the country have rejected being part of ICE’s cruel, costly, and destructive system of immigrant detention. It is time for Maryland to step forward as well.

Immigration detention has no place in the state of Maryland.

MDAID urges a favorable report on SB 478/HB 16.