



SB 478 / HB 16 - SUPPORT

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

February 10, 2021

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

Indivisible Worcester Maryland is pleased to offer its testimony in support of SB478/HB16. Our all-volunteer group was founded in January 2017 in order to fight peaceably and Constitutionally against Trump's racist, misogynist, authoritarian, and corrupt agenda. We plan to continue for at least the next four years to speak out and work for equality among all people, a stronger democracy, and honest government, despite escalating right-wing political violence in the United States.

It is no secret that many policies Trump enforced through Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other agencies of the Federal government were rooted in old-fashioned, violent, American racism. His official violence towards immigrants of color led to denial of rights under U. S. law, indefinite incarceration, unjust deportation, separation of children, the spread of disease, and the deaths of untold thousands of migrants in the Southwestern deserts. It is no secret, either, that the same racism that motivated those violent policies is deeply rooted here on Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore. After all, the Eastern Shore's two most illustrious historical figures were people of color, Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas, who gained fame by escaping it.

Our group, predominantly White, struggles to change this legacy, but many people of color in Worcester, Wicomico, and Somerset Counties have sound reason to be profoundly suspicious of anyone who looks like us. Trump's violence signaled that racism was our nation's official policy, further dividing us by race from our allies, emboldening injustice, and causing many who want to speak out new worries about their safety. That fear is real and realistic. Closing the detention center in Snow Hill will send a strong signal that political violence, official or otherwise, is no longer tolerable.

We have heard this bill's opponents say that it will deprive Worcester County of needed funds and stop the creation of jobs by private prisons. But those same opponents have refused to pursue more humane funding sources, and they have opposed the entry of more forward-looking, ethical industries into our County. Maryland's Eastern Shore must reject its racist legacy now and move forward without turning profits from hate.

We urge a favorable report on SB 478/HB16.