



February 10, 2021

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

To: Senator Will Smith, Chair, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

NASW-MD urges you to support SB478, Dignity Not Detention Act, which bans any new contracts or renewals of existing contracts with detention facilities operated wholly (or in part) by private corporations; ensures that the public is adequately informed in any plans for a new private detention facility to take place; requires local entities that already have an existing immigration detention agreement (Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) to terminate the contract by June 2021. Last session the bill was introduced as SB850/HB677.

NASW is the largest national organization of social workers representing over 120,000 social workers and over 16,000 of those are licensed here in the state of Maryland. The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. Our nation's undocumented immigrant population is an oppressed and marginalized population that needs relief from the structural problems in our immigration system.

We must start by ending our most egregious acts of systemic violence; the taking away of people's right to be free. Our nation's excessive use of detention is detrimental to immigrants, their families, and our society as a whole. It contributes to a society where we are more likely to "lock them up" than "lift them up." It creates a terrorizing environment for immigrants and undermines our fundamental job as a community to care for one another. Maryland does not need to be complicit with these practices and should not allow Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to have detention centers here.

We suggest that instead of detaining immigrants and costing taxpayers millions of dollars, we should provide support and case management to immigrants. Some of the alternatives to detention include regulated and mandated check-ins with law enforcement, communication with authorities by telephone, linking families to community-based psychosocial services, or electronic monitoring of some individuals. Studies show that asylum seekers are very compliant in appearing for their immigration court hearings and that these services can be provided at a fraction of the cost of detention. Alternatives to detention cost only around \$5 or \$6 per person versus the \$118 or more it costs to detain someone every day. More importantly, alternative programs do not result in detaining very small children, taking children away from their parents, or implementing policies that violate basic American values.

The State of Maryland should lead the way in standing up to tyranny, violence, racism, and bigotry that is imbedded in our immigration detention system. Social workers will support you every step of the way. Please pass SB 478 with no amendments.

Sincerely,

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