

Testimony of Richard Kohn, Ph.D.
Columbia, Howard County, MD
In Support of SB 478
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 10, 2021

Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Richard Kohn from Columbia, MD and I strongly support Senate Bill 478 (Dignity Not Detention). No private or public organization in Maryland should be permitted to profit by detaining immigrants for civil immigration violations. All existing contracts with ICE should be canceled immediately starting with the agreement to hold immigrants in ICE detention in three counties in Maryland.

We already have a highly punitive criminal justice system to deal with criminals. Immigrants and people of color are already tried and punished disproportionately by this system. Immigrants in ICE detention centers are people who cannot be imprisoned by the criminal justice system because they were never accused or convicted of a crime, or if they were, they already served their entire sentence. Currently, they have to serve a second detention in our ICE facilities and this is unacceptable. None of them should be detained any longer for civil violations.

Notably, you can see from my address that I live near one of the state's notorious ICE detention centers which is located in Jessup Maryland. This facility was written up by the Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General for conducting unnecessary repeated strip searches as well as providing substandard meals (Oct. 28, 2020).

The Howard County Auditor published partial budgets showing a 75% profit margin that is maintained by spending only a few dollars a day per detainee on food and hygiene, and no money allocated for medicine (see attached addendum). Given these data, it is not surprising that inmates say they are not provided with adequate food or healthcare. Howard County claims to hold prisoners for ICE purely as a mercenary act without knowledge or concern for why they were detained in the first place.

ICE has operated as an illegal and racist organization selectively enforcing immigration civil violations with extreme measures against Black and Brown people. In fact, nearly all the immigrants in ICE detention in Howard County are from Mexico, Central America, Caribbean and Africa. ICE has left immigrants including children to die from neglect while in detention with inadequate food and shelter, and has forcibly sterilized women.

No private or public entity should be permitted to cooperate with ICE to engage in racial profiling and oppression in the state of Maryland. Please support SB 478.

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