

February 9, 2021

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB478
Correctional Services – Immigration Detention – Prohibition
(Dignity Not Detention Act)

My name is Louise Weissman, I live in Greenbelt in District 22. Prior to retiring, I worked for United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the country. Now I am a member of Bend the Arc - Prince George's County Minyan, a member of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), and I am an ally of CASA de Maryland. I am writing to you about a very urgent matter; one that is not new, but exacerbated over these past four years. My testimony is in support of SB478 - the Dignity Not Detention Act.

The Torah commands us to love and welcome refugees. Leviticus 19:34 states: "The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." The vast majority of citizens in the United States have been immigrants from other countries, and many faced oppression in their homelands, something we deeply identify with as Jews.

I also write as the daughter and granddaughter of immigrants who settled in Boston shortly before and after WWI. They had faith that the United States of America would be welcoming even as they faced discrimination and hate in the form of antisemitism in their new homeland. Still, they were able to nurture their children and did well.

Currently in Maryland, there are three counties (Frederick, Howard, and Worcester counties) with contracts to detain immigrants for ICE, and ICE is now working to build a private detention center in the state. The Dignity not Detention ACT will prohibit local jurisdictions from entering into or renewing contracts with ICE to detain immigrants and require transparency in permitting and zoning for privately built and operated ICE facilities.

I fully support those immigrants who seek to establish their new home through citizenship as my family did. Many, particularly those living below our Southern Border, want to be free from the fear of being terrorized in their original countries. For this reason, I support the Dignity Not Detention Act, which will abolish all contracts between the state of Maryland and ICE, and prevent the building of new immigrant detention centers.

The United States has always stood as a beacon of hope for those who made passage to come to this country. The Statue of Liberty stands in Upper New York Bay, a universal symbol of freedom, hope, and liberty with the following invitation: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore." It is time for the US government to give immigrants a pathway to citizenship as well as to welcome who come next to our shores. It is my hope that Maryland will stand up in leadership and support this important bill. I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB478.

Louise Weissman