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Tiffen Lovler Tapia
Baltimore, MD 21231



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB750/SB317

**Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings
Coordinator**

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Tiffen Lovler Tapia, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Tiffen Lovler Tapia and I live in Baltimore City in District 46. I am providing this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes more than 5,500 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice. This testimony is in support of HB750/SB317, Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator, Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings.

As a third generation American, the history of my family is like the story of most Americans, and many Jews. Our Jewish tradition teaches that it is our responsibility to welcome migrants. Jews have had to flee in order to save our lives and the lives of our children many times in our history, and have been seen as foreigners in the places we have called home for centuries. Many American residents have immigrated in the hope of finding a better future for themselves and their loved ones. The details of my family's history are lost; however, what we do know is that the journey was a long and arduous one. What we could piece together was that at the beginning of the 20th century they emigrated from Eastern Europe. Some were escaping the battles of World War I in Russia. Others were escaping the pogroms, the persecution of Jews that were occurring in Poland. They trekked across Europe until they reached the coast of Hamburg, Germany to board the ships that would take them to the United States. Soon after their arrival they settled in Newark, New Jersey and their children became adults and started their own families. My grandfather and grandmother met and married and my mother was eventually born.

My family endured this incredible journey to escape death and to go to a country that would welcome them and offer a better future for everyone. They believed they could have a fair chance at that future in the United States. Though the people and times are different, the reasons why people leave their homelands have not changed. Some are escaping persecution and violence and fear for their lives. They keep moving forward, because they believe and hope that the United States will provide a better future and give them a fair chance. Unfortunately, the United States does not always live up to its ideals, but we strive to make it better with each passing year.

This is why I support a right to counsel in immigration hearings. This bill will help provide all immigrants a fair chance by treating them fairly in court. The bureaucracy and laws of our immigration system need to be overhauled and part of that reform must include a right to counsel. Maryland must do what it can to provide a fair chance for justice for immigrants here in our state.

Joining the national movement for a right to counsel in immigration court would be consistent with Maryland's own tradition of welcoming immigrants to the United States. A century and a half ago, Locust Point was the third busiest port, opening its doors to more than a million newcomers. They made Baltimore and other cities their homes. Today large numbers of immigrants continue to make Maryland their home and contribute greatly to our local economy and culture. It is up to us to help them succeed here and we can do that by ensuring their right to counsel in immigration court.

For all of these reasons, JUFJ respectfully urges a favorable report on HB750/SB317.