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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB750

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

My name is Rebecca Goldfinger. I live in Silver Spring in District 20. I am testifying in support of HB750: Universal Representation. I am writing as a member of JUFJ and in allyship with CASA. As Jews, we are commanded to live by the Biblical words of Exodus 22:21: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Like so many other Jews in this country, I am descended from brave people who left Eastern Europe to escape religious persecution and poverty. One of my maternal great-grandmothers left the Ukraine because of pogroms there and arrived in the United States at the age of seventeen, alone, speaking no English. Fortunately, she and my great-grandfather were lucky enough to achieve the American Dream of a better life for their descendants. But what if, instead, my forebears had been apprehended by ICE and deported, because they did not have access to counsel who could present their case in immigration court?

I believe that all individuals are entitled to due process under the law. Because the legal system is incredibly complex, and many immigrants who are caught up in immigration cases are not yet even proficient in English, it is unlikely that they can win their cases on their own. According to statistics provided by CASA and the VERA Institute of Justice, having access to counsel can improve chances of success by at least 10 times. I have read stories about people like CASA member Eddy, who was detained in 2017 and had no access to counsel, so he was deported, leaving behind his wife and three-year-old daughter. This breaks my heart. Eddy might well still be in Maryland today, if he had been represented in immigration court.

Because my own family were once strangers here, I empathize with people whose journeys from other places are a bit more recent than mine. I feel very strongly that we must not detain or deport immigrants, but rather allow them to establish themselves in American society, as my own family did.

For this reason, I support HB750, which would provide legal representation to people in immigration detention in Maryland and Maryland residents detained in other states, and which would provide holistic support to the families of detained Marylanders facing deportation.

I believe that as a country, we must stop wronging the immigrants in our midst, and I believe that this legislation is a step in the right direction. I hope that you will return a favorable vote for HB750. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Goldfinger