

Testimony on Council Bill 26-0144 - Safe Spaces and Communities
Position: Support with Amendments

To: Council Member Mark Conway, Chair
Council Member Zac Blanchard, Vice Chair
Members of the Baltimore City Council Public Safety Committee

From: Monique L. Dixon, Executive Director and Michael Pinard, Faculty Director, Gibson-Banks
Center for Race and the Law

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Date: March 9, 2026

On behalf of the Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law (“Gibson-Banks Center”) and the Chacón Center for Immigrant Justice (“Chacón Center or the Center”) at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law,¹ we appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Council Bill 26-0144. The Gibson-Banks Center works collaboratively to re-imagine and transform institutions and systems of racial inequality, marginalization, and oppression. Through education, advocacy, and research, the Center examines and addresses racial inequality, including the intersection of race with sex, gender, or disability, and advances racial justice in a variety of issue areas, including the criminal legal system and public safety. The Chacón Center works to create a future where all Maryland families and residents are stable and secure regardless of immigration status, race, or economics. The Center supports vigorous advocacy for immigrant justice and, through its clinics, provides direct representation and engages in litigation on issues of asylum and the intersection of criminal and immigration law.

We urge committee members to vote in favor of Council Bill 26-0144 – Safe Spaces and Communities, which seeks to protect all Baltimore City residents, particularly Black and Brown immigrants, from unlawful federal immigration enforcement activities. We respectfully ask that you

¹ This written testimony is submitted on behalf of the Gibson-Banks Center and the Chacón Center and not on behalf of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, or the University System of Maryland.

consider amending the bill by including enforcement mechanisms described below, which would help city officials to monitor compliance with the proposed city ordinance.

Council Bill 26-0144 is being introduced at critical moment. Maryland is home to a growing population of immigrants, including Black and Brown immigrants from the Caribbean² and Latin America. Reportedly, arrests by federal agents from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency have nearly tripled in Maryland from 2024 to 2025.³ In Baltimore, these arrests have included violent interactions between federal immigration agents and residents who were doing nothing more than reporting to work or taking their children to school.⁴

The Council Bill would help to give Baltimore City residents the confidence to access essential city services, knowing that immigration status will not be used to disqualify them and that City policy will decrease the likelihood of violent and unlawful clashes with immigration officials. The Bill does this by, among other things, prohibiting city agencies that provide direct public services as well as entities that contract with them (collectively referred to as city agencies) from: discriminating against a person based on their actual or perceived citizenship or immigration status; cooperating with immigration officials unless they are required to do so by federal or state law or court order; asking a person to disclose or storing any information about a person's citizenship or immigration status, or investigating persons' citizenship or immigration status unless required by a law, court order, or for a city function. Council Bill 26-0144 bill would also require city agencies to develop an immigration enforcement action response plan for preventing immigration officials from accessing space that is not open to the public without a judicial warrant; and the BPD to deescalate any life-threatening interactions between immigration officials and a person.

The provisions of the bill are necessary and urgent. They would be stronger, however, if there were enforcement mechanisms included to ensure that city agencies are complying with the bill. For example, the bill could include a process by which aggrieved persons could file a complaint alleging violations of provisions of the bill or one in which city agencies would be required to undergo occasional compliance reviews and corrective actions if agencies have been found out of compliance with any bill provision.

We support Council Bill 26-0144 because it is an important step in protecting Baltimore residents from unlawful immigration enforcement and time is of the absolute essence. However, for the reasons stated above, we urge Public Safety Committee members to vote in support of the bill with our suggested amendments.

² See, e.g. Valerie Lacarte, *A Profile of the Growing Black Immigrant Population in the United States*, Migration Policy Institute, 7 (Feb. 2026)(showing Baltimore among the top 20 metropolitan areas for Black immigrants in the U.S.), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-black-immigrants-2026-final.pdf>.

³ Kate Amara and Khiree Stewart, 'It scares me': Marylanders protesting as data shows ICE arrests nearly tripled in 2025, WBALTV 11, Jan. 12, 2026 (citing to data collected by the Deportation Data Project that shows from January through October 2025, ICE arrested more than 3,300 people in Maryland compared to 1,165 during the same time period in the previous year.), <https://www.wbalTV.com/article/marylanders-protesting-data-ice-arrests-nearly-tripled-2025/69980610>.

⁴ Christine Condon, 'ICE out of Baltimore!': Recent immigration raids prompt Baltimore protest Local immigrant advocates cite 16 recent detentions at grocery stores and other locations, Maryland Matters, Jun. 12, 2025, <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/06/12/ice-raids-baltimore-protest-casa/>.