



Testimony FOR Bill 5-26

Police – Mask or Facial Coverings – Prohibited (The Unmask ICE Act)

Montgomery County Council

March 3, 2026

Dear President Fani-González and members of the Council,

SSJC is pleased to offer **favorable testimony in strong support** of **Bill 5-26** Police – Mask or Facial Coverings – Prohibited (The Unmask ICE Act). This is crucial legislation to ensure that all County residents feel safe, valued, and welcome in our communities while upholding civil and constitutional rights.

SSJC works to reduce the harms of policing while empowering communities. Critical to this is ensuring that residents feel safe in going out into the community and not be at risk in encounters with local authorities, including law enforcement.

Our immigrant community is under siege by federal government actions. Places in Montgomery County that used to bustle are empty and quiet because immigrants (and some who might be perceived as immigrants) are afraid to venture out for fear of a chance encounter with federal officials or even local law enforcement. Immigrants are having food delivered by local mutual aid groups, getting others to take their children to school (or keeping them home), setting up Standby Guardianship for their children in case the parents are detained or deported, and even afraid to answer their phones or open their door to anyone they do not know.

Meanwhile, immigrants are getting detained when going to required government appointments in Baltimore and Silver Spring, and are now subject to deportation to a “safe” third country even when they present a valid asylum claim in immigration court that is based on harm if they returned to their country of origin. So our immigrants are increasingly fearful of going to required government appointments, which ensures they are targeted and face deportation if found.

Allowing law enforcement to hide behind face masks, simply increases the terror of law enforcement encounters and distrust of engaging with law enforcement. Such distrust leads immigrants to not report crimes or serve as witnesses, which makes all of us less safe.

During this time, SSJC welcomes policies and legislation that focus on ensuring that community members feel safe, not threatened by their local government. Thus we strongly support this legislation which seeks to promote the safety of all and minimize the risks immigrants face by prohibiting law enforcement from using masks to hide behind, only allowing them when necessary for specified reasons related to safeguarding health.

Montgomery County, where immigrants make up 30% of the County's population, knows firsthand the value of diverse communities and the vibrant social fabric that is woven when those communities come together to learn, to work, and to care for one another. This legislation continues to uphold this truth and honor these immigrant communities. This is extremely necessary and much welcomed during this time of uncertainty and increased ICE enforcement in our Montgomery County communities, and it aligns with the County being a welcoming jurisdiction for residents, regardless of their immigration status.

Montgomery County must stand firmly on the side of families, community trust, racial justice, and constitutional rights. By adopting these protections, the Council will send a clear message that the County rejects terrorizing residents and reaffirms its commitment to being a truly welcoming and safe place for all residents.

SSJC urges a favorable report on Bill 5-26 Police – Mask or Facial Coverings – Prohibited (The Unmask ICE Act).