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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL 3-26 AND BILL 5-26
The County Values Act and The Unmask ICE Act

TO: Council President Fani-González, Vice President Balcombe, and members of the County Council

FROM: Alyssa Henning

My name is Alyssa Henning. I am a resident of North Bethesda in District 4 and an immigration attorney. On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 3-26, The County Values Act, and Bill 5-26, The Unmask ICE Act.

Thank you to Councilmember Mink, Councilmember Jawando, Councilmember Stewart, Councilmember Evans, Councilmember Sayles, and Councilmember Glass, for sponsoring both of these bills, and to Councilmember Friedson and Councilmember Balcombe for sponsoring the County Values Act.

Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) represents more than 2,500 Jews and allies throughout Montgomery County, who act on our shared Jewish values to advance social, racial, and economic justice. The value of being welcoming to newcomers in a land is a core Jewish tenet – one that we see frequently in the Torah. The Torah tells the story of Abraham enthusiastically rushing out to meet three travelers, inviting them into his tent to feed them and wash their feet. Early rabbis taught that the tent-flaps of Abraham and Sarah’s tent were open on all sides so that travelers could find welcome and respite no matter which direction they came from.

Montgomery County is a vibrant community whose members come from so many different places. Just like Abraham and Sarah, our County is better, and our communities are stronger, for the ways we welcome immigrants here.

Since moving to Montgomery County in 2021, I have represented immigrants throughout the DMV, primarily in the region’s four Immigration Courts and at the Board of Immigration Appeals. Many of my clients are asylum-seekers who came to the United States hoping to escape the violence, death threats, and persecution that chased them out of their home countries. Without fail, each of my clients is, understandably, very nervous about their Immigration Court case. But before January 2025, they would say, almost unanimously, that they had found an ability to live in peace since coming to the United States that they could never hope for in their home countries. That isn’t true anymore.

For the past year, the alarming surge in violent immigration detentions and deportations by ICE officers that we have witnessed across the United States and here in our community has sent immigrants the message that they are not welcome here.

I know that the actions of federal ICE officers do not reflect the values of Montgomery County or its residents. I know this because just last month, the County Council unanimously passed the County Trust Act, ensuring that all Montgomery County residents can access county services free from discrimination and that no Montgomery County resident needs to fear that County employees or local law enforcement officers will voluntarily turn them over to ICE. The County Values Act and the Unmask ICE Act build on the County Trust Act in important ways, which is why I urge the County Council to pass *both* of these bills without delay.

The County Values Act does three important things:

1. It keeps ICE out of County Property that is not open to the general public unless the officer has a valid warrant signed by a judge;
2. It prevents ICE from using County-owned parking lots and garages as staging grounds to kidnap our neighbors; and
3. It equips County employees and contractors with clear policy guidance and training so that they may confidently implement these restrictions on ICE.

The County Values Act affirms for our community that no matter where we were born, we all have the right to participate in County spaces without the fear of being kidnapped by ICE and lawlessly separated from our loved ones. Just as importantly, it addresses the unfortunate reality of ICE's violent enforcement actions by making sure Montgomery County employees and contractors have clear directives and training to put these limits on ICE enforcement into practice.

The Unmask ICE Act, in turn, holds all law enforcement officers accountable for the actions they take on duty in Montgomery County, by expanding and codifying into law Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)'s existing policy against masks. When ICE officers refuse to follow the law, do not wear clearly marked uniforms, and evade legal consequences, the community will know they are not MCPD. Banning these face coverings is a promise to the people of Montgomery County that our local law enforcement officers will not use ICE's cowardly tactics and sends a clear message that Montgomery County will not tolerate unlawful behavior by officers from *any* law enforcement agency who carries out their duties in our County.

I urge the Council to pass Bill 3-26 and Bill 5-26 quickly and without any weakening amendments. Thank you.