



Children's HealthWatch

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828/HB 1006

**HB 1006/SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies
(Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)**

Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee

February 27, 2025

March 4, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

Children's HealthWatch is pleased to offer a favorable testimony in strong support of HB 1006/SB 828 - Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act).

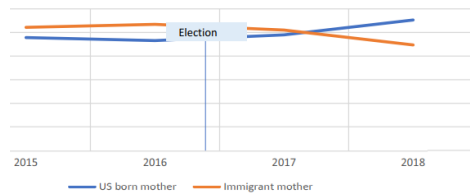
I am a licensed psychologist and Professor Emeritus in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. For over 25 years I directed an interdisciplinary Growth & Nutrition Clinic for children under 3-years-of age whose growth was faltering. We provided services for many immigrant families, often with children born in the US. I came to better understand the challenges and stigma that immigrant parents experience. I also served as a principal investigator of Children's HealthWatch. I can share many personal stories of families who were frightened to access healthcare, even when their children were US-born. As a child psychologist, I can also attest that children are excellent observers and when they perceive that their parents are worried or being traumatized or threatened, children themselves experience trauma and strong feelings of insecurity. It is critical that we ensure that children are safe and secure in schools, health centers, houses of worship, courts, and other sites where children and families should feel safe. In addition to my clinical insight, I will share some data from Children's HealthWatch.

Children's HealthWatch is a nonpartisan network of pediatricians, public health researchers, and children's health and policy experts from urban hospitals in Boston, MA; Baltimore, MD; Little Rock, AR; Minneapolis, MN; and Philadelphia, PA. We are committed to improving children's health in America. We do that by collecting real-time data and interviewing families with infants and toddlers who are facing economic hardship. In Baltimore, we interview families who bring

their young children to the University of Maryland Emergency Department for health care. We analyze and share our findings with academics, legislators, and the public.

Our findings help policymakers and the public better understand the social and economic factors that impact children's health so they can make well-informed policy decisions that can give all children equal opportunities for healthy, successful lives.

Threats related to potential sanctions or deportation can affect immigrants' access and utilization of health care. To see whether rhetoric extends to health care for children of immigrants, we focused on the well-child visits recommended for children under 3-years-of age. Well-child visits are recommended for every child by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Well-child visits are critical for young children because children receive essential screening for issues that can be prevented early in life (such as vision, hearing, language, motor, and cognitive skills). We used electronic health records to compare children's well-child visits among over 7,000 families (half with immigrant mothers and half with US-born mothers). We targeted 2015-2018 to capture 2 years preceding and following Trump's election. What we found was startling! In the 2-year



period prior to the 2016 election, there were no significant differences in rates of well-child visits between children of immigrant and US-born parents. However, in the 2-year period following Trump's election, there was a 5-percentage-point decrease in well-child visits among children of immigrant mothers (follow the red-line in the

figure), presumably associated with the increase in rhetoric regarding deportation and stigmatization of immigrants. This means that children of immigrant parents were less likely to receive the essential screening and vaccinations!

Since January 20, 2025, there has been a dramatic increase in threats to immigrant families that could be extremely unsettling to their children and may cause families to refrain from accessing the services that they and their children need.

Children's HealthWatch stands with immigrant children and families and supports the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act because it will:

1. **Protect Access to Essential Services:** No one should have to choose between life-saving medical care and the risk of family separation. Families and individuals must be able to obtain food to nourish their families, drop off their children to school or child care, and worship without the threat of detention.
2. **Enhance Public Safety:** When immigrants feel safe accessing services and reporting crimes, our entire community benefits. Fear of enforcement discourages individuals from cooperating with law enforcement and leads to children also fearing police, which in turn hampers public safety efforts.

3. **Strengthen Community Trust:** By establishing clear boundaries for immigration enforcement, we foster trust between immigrant families and the institutions meant to serve them. This trust is essential for maintaining a healthy, vibrant, and cohesive society.

4. **Safeguard Children's Well-Being:** Immigration enforcement conducted in places that are meant to provide children with a sense of safety and security can traumatize children. Children deserve to attend child care programs and school and receive timely, high-quality health care without fear that they will be separated from their loved ones.

Children's HealthWatch and I urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 828/HB 1006.