



## House Bill 444

### *Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement Agreements - Prohibition*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: January 27, 2026

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 444. This bill prohibits counties from having or establishing an immigration enforcement agreement. The bill would require the termination of nine existing agreements principally with county detention centers. It would also limit the ability of local law enforcement to establish legally binding standards and expectations with federal agencies that are operating within the local jurisdictions.

Counties understand the serious and sensitive nature of nationwide immigration enforcement. Tactics employed by federal agencies at times have sparked justified fear and concerns. It is also clear that the types of enforcement activity by federal agencies in local communities varies greatly. Under these circumstances, local governments need to have as many tools as possible to compel federal agencies to share plans and intentions as well as establish legally binding expectations for those interactions and potentially coordinated efforts, as outlined in the Maryland Attorney General's guidance on the issue.

Preserving local autonomy in entering into these agreements allows counties to understand, educate, and maintain a critical eye on federal agents, many of whom are likely novices. These official agreements serve as an opportunity to make federal agents aware of the local agencies' own norms, standards, and policies. A lack of regular communication and documented boundaries and standards can create confusion and mistrust that could inadvertently disrupt or harm residents at a time of increased enforcement. Worse, a ban on such agreements could lead to retaliation and withholding of vital information from local law enforcement and detention centers seeking to protect residents. In contrast, the formally binding agreements let local law enforcement agencies stay close to and better coordinate with these federal actors.

Having the flexibility to establish clear agreements, with boundaries and standards for cooperation, while in compliance with the Attorney General's guidance, serves to protect local governments from unforeseen liability and establishes a rapport that can make existing federal strategies less disruptive and less dangerous for vulnerable communities. For these reasons MACo **OPPOSES** HB 444 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.