

**Rabbi Sonya Starr's Testimony
Before Howard County Council**

January 17, 2017

My name is Sonya Starr and I am an ordained Rabbi. Today I am representing Howard County's Board of rabbis and myself as a voting resident of Howard County. I am here asking each of you to vote for Bill No. 9-2017 and take a stand to protect some of our most vulnerable residents in Howard County.

I would like to begin by telling you two short stories. One about a woman named Sarah and the other about a man named William. Sarah was born and raised in the old country. She was the one of a very big family that was targeted for violence, unemployment, discrimination, and hate crimes on a regular basis. Her family designated her older single unattached brother to come to the United States of America. It took years before the system worked and he was finally granted legal passage to the United States. Unfortunately by the time the papers came, he was ill and unable to leave. So Sarah dressed up as a man left the old country at the age of 17. With one small problem yet to be solved, Sarah needed to be sponsored by an American citizen. Thankfully for her there were men who were for hire. You paid them enough money and they became your uncle for the day. I say lucky for her because she had the money in hand to pay; others paid by becoming prostitutes until they had paid off their passage.

The other person's story I would like to share with you is Williams. William was also born in the old country. His family's papers to immigrate to the United States did not come until he was 6 years old. Before that when he was four he fell down a flight of stairs. He destroyed his ear drum and never heard another sound again. Because of the lack of medical and educational resources available to those in poverty he never made any sounds except to grunt. When his family got to Ellis Island they lied and said he was shy, fluent in two languages, and had a head cold.

Both Sarah and William were allowed into this country and eventually became naturalized citizens. William grew up and married Martha another child immigrant. Sarah married Morris who also immigrated as an adult. Between the four of them their descendants became TV repair men, successful business men and women, CPAs, high school English teachers, decorated service men in the Navy and infantry, sign language interpreters, New York City defense lawyer, Columbus Ohio TV sports reporter, and social workers. Their descendants marched for civil rights, the end of the Vietnam War, lobbied our legislatures for better child care education, and marriage equality. They even have a congregational rabbi who lives and works in Howard County in their family tree. You see Morris, Sarah, William and Martha are my grandparents. All four of them immigrated to this country; two of them legally, following all the rules while two of them, Sarah and William's parents, lied, manipulated, deceived and bought their way into this country. The only thing that separates Sarah and William from the undocumented residents of Howard County is 100 years; nothing more and nothing less.

Our undocumented neighbors have fled extreme poverty, relentless violence, horrific persecution and unavailable medical care to come to a country where they often do not know the language, the laws, how the schools or court system works in order to give their documented children and grandchildren a better life. They are tax paying, hardworking contributing members of our community. They are the patriarchs and matriarchs of tomorrow's lawyers, doctors and county council members.

Why do I tell you the story of my grandparents? I tell you my grandparents' story because I am commanded as a Jew and as a human being to remember the lessons of the past. It says in the Hebrew Bible no less than 36 times to remember that you were a stranger in the land of Egypt. I am to remember what happened to the ship loads of people we turned back who died at sea or back at home. I am to remember that there are parts of this world that are so violent and terrifying, or so poor and hungry that we

here in Howard County have no point of reference. I am to remember that the vast majority of immigrants to this country today just like 100 years ago are hardworking, dedicated, tax paying, contributing members of society. I am to remember so that I will do everything in my power to support, and legitimize their path to citizenship.

The Talmud is one of the oldest sacred Jewish books. It says in the Talmud "Whoever saves one life saves the whole world." When I originally signed up to testify, I did so as a private resident of Howard County. Between then and now the Howard County Board of Rabbis voted for me to represent them as we all ask you, the members of Howard County's County council, to save not only one life but many to codify our way of life so that the non-violent residents of Howard county will not have to worry about deportation because they ran a red light, or received a speeding ticket. We are asking you to vote for Bill No. 9-2017 and allow Howard County to become a sanctuary County protecting all its residents, not only those lucky enough to immigrate 100 or 200 years earlier. Thank you for your time and attention.