Bom dia. Good morning all.

My name is Dulce Ferreira, and I am the Director of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program at MAPS, the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers. We are a community-based private nonprofit organization that has provided culturally and linguistically appropriate health and social services to the large Portuguese and Cape Verdean Creole-speaking communities of Massachusetts and others for the past 50 years.

As we gather here this morning with so many outstanding community leaders, activists and organizations who have worked tirelessly in advocating for this bill, I am testifying to respectfully express MAPS’ strong support for the Massachusetts Safe Communities Act.

We believe that no immigrants should have to fear for their safety and the integrity of their families when they need to reach out to the authorities for help. When immigrants hesitate in reaching out to the police, not only does that put their own lives at risk, it also endangers the entire community. In a state where one in six residents is an immigrant, this is a potential public health and safety crisis in the making.

When it comes to immigrant victims and survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault, who already face so many barriers when accessing the justice and resources they desperately need, recent reports indicate that a large majority are afraid of contacting the police or going to court for fear of deportation and being separated from their families. This should concern and outrage us all.

Those of us working daily with these strong women and men facing incredible challenges know that their fear is not an abstract possibility. We hear it every single day. “I can’t go to court, what if ICE shows up?”; “What if I call the police and they report me to ICE?”. As advocates, our job is to comfort them and guide them to safety. But if public trust in the authorities is left to further erode, we can’t help but feel powerless in the face of these concerns.

It is vitally important – in some cases, it truly is a matter of life or death – that the state does everything in its power to rebuild public trust in law enforcement, guarantee access to justice FOR ALL who call Massachusetts home, regardless of where they were born, and to reassure all immigrants, especially those facing violence, that the state is on their side. The measures contained in this bill are very important steps in that direction.

Massachusetts has always been a welcoming place for immigrants looking to start a new life in the US. Now is the time to ensure that it is also a SAFE place for all.

The Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers is proud to endorse this important bill, and we respectfully urge the committee to bring the Safe Communities Act to a vote as soon as possible.

Obrigada. Thank you.