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Letter to the Editor: The Last Word on Rockville Immigration Protests

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Regarding Gail Weiss's [Letter to the Editor of Sept. 18](#), I am sorry that Ms. Weiss was offended by being called "anti-immigrant." Unfortunately, she chose to attend and support an event organized by right-wing extremists, hate groups, and neo-Nazis, at which speakers and attendees demonized immigrants to bolster support for policies of cruelty and fear that do not make anyone in our county or our country safer.

Help Save Maryland, the group that co-organized the Rockville rally, has been classified by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a "[Nativist Extremist Group](#)" that is "anti-immigrant." The celebrity guest at the rally, and one of two listed "hosts" on the rally's Facebook Event page, was Michelle Malkin, who has authored books that defend Japanese internment and post-9/11 racial profiling. Her latest work argues that the increase in people seeking asylum and refuge in the U.S. – and the increasing numbers of people living their lives here without legal authorization – is a conspiracy to financially enrich the "global elite," Silicon Valley, and the "Radical Left." I had a [bizarre debate with Ms. Malkin on WUSA9](#) the evening after the rally, during which she claimed that progressive Jewish philanthropist George Soros is funding this conspiracy. This is the same anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant trope that motivated the perpetrator of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue massacre.

Besides Ms. Malkin, and as this publication noted, also present at the rally was Sebastian Gorka, former Trump aide with [well-documented links](#) to anti-Semitic, Nazi-sympathizing fascist groups in Hungary. It wasn't just the organizers who spouted hate: while Ms. Weiss may feel she was supporting legal immigration, she stood among people holding signs saying, "Rapists Love Women Who Hate Guns," as well as people bearing White Nationalist tattoos.

The rally Ms. Weiss so enthusiastically attended was designed to stoke unfounded fears about undocumented immigrants and exploit the pain of members of our community who have been the victims of crimes. Data published by numerous sources demonstrate that undocumented immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than United States citizens, and that [communities with higher rates of undocumented immigrants have lower crime rates overall](#). According to [the Cato Institute](#), "The vast majority of research finds that immigrants do not increase local crime rates and that they are less likely to cause crime or be incarcerated than native-born citizens." Of course we must sympathize with families who have lost loved ones to violent crimes, but it is

beyond crass to use their stories to paint a demonstrably false portrait of immigrants as violent criminals in order to gin up support for hateful, cruel, and frankly ineffective policies.

This anti-immigrant rally was called to oppose Montgomery County's recent Executive Order which, among other things, prohibits the county from holding people in detention beyond their release dates upon written request from ICE. Every time someone is released from our county jail, it is because a county judge decided that it was safe to do so, whether that person is undocumented, documented, naturalized, or a native-born citizen. Imprisoning people, even undocumented immigrants, after they've been cleared for release is a violation of the Fourth Amendment's prohibition on unlawful detentions.

The Executive Order's limits on cooperation between county law enforcement and ICE actually increases the safety of our community. It ensures that people at risk of deportation who are witnesses to or victims of crimes are not afraid to call the police. The ever-increasing need to convince our immigrant community members that they will not end up in ICE custody if they assist law enforcement is why the Montgomery County Police Department supports the Executive Order.

A person's immigration and citizenship status does not, statistically, make them a danger to our community. The rally organizers' and participants' insistence that it does is rooted in the very same xenophobia that has animated anti-immigrant sentiment throughout our nation's history, including the time when Ms. Weiss's, and my, Jewish ancestors emigrated here.

Perhaps she is unaware that the avenues for legal immigration to this country that were available to our grandparents and great-grandparents basically no longer exist. They were closed by Congress in 1921 and 1924. Later, tens of thousands of Jewish refugees attempting to flee Nazi Europe were denied passage to the U.S. or sent back to be tortured or murdered in the Nazi camps.

I hope that Ms. Weiss will join me in pushing Congress to fix our broken immigration, asylum, and refugee systems so that today's immigrants have real pathways to safety and citizenship – and that she will reconsider in the future whether she wants to stand with people spreading anti-immigrant lies and hate.

— JOANNA SILVER