



February 20, 2024

Subject: Urgent Support for HB0892 - Criminal Law: Benefits Trafficking

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, & Members of the Judiciary Committee,

We trust this letter finds you well. As dedicated Council Members representing Baltimore City and passionate advocates for the well-being of our community, we are writing to express our wholehearted support for **House Bill 0892 (HB0892) - Criminal Law: Benefits Trafficking**. We believe this legislation is a crucial step forward in addressing a pressing issue that affects vulnerable individuals across our state and the nation.

The exploitation of benefits, often resulting in severe consequences for those who depend on social welfare programs, is a matter that demands our immediate attention. HB0892, which aims to re-classify the exploitation of benefits as a form of human trafficking, expanding the definition of human trafficking in Maryland's criminal code, aligns with our shared commitment to protecting the most vulnerable members of our society.

By recognizing benefit exploitation as a form of human trafficking, this legislation not only acknowledges the gravity of the issue but also empowers law enforcement and social service agencies to take effective measures against those who engage in such illicit activities. It is imperative that we address this gap in our legal framework to safeguard the integrity of our social support systems and break the cycle of exploitation that perpetuates poverty and vulnerability.

We urge you to vote in favor of HB0892, as its passage will send a powerful message that the State of Maryland is dedicated to ensuring the protection and well-being of all residents. As City Council Members, we have seen firsthand the struggles faced by constituents who rely on benefits to meet their basic needs; benefits exploitation poses a multifaceted danger by harming individuals, eroding the effectiveness of social welfare programs, contributing to criminal activities, and undermining public trust. Supporting this legislation is an essential step in creating a safer, more just, and compassionate society for everyone.

Thank you for your tireless dedication to public service and your consideration of this crucial matter. Your support for HB0892 will undoubtedly contribute to the betterment of our community and the lives of those who depend on social welfare programs. **We urge you to vote favorably on HB0892.**

Respectfully,

Council President Nick J. Mosby
Vice President Sharon Green Middleton, 6th District
Councilman Zeke Cohen, 1st District
Councilman Ryan Dorsey, 3rd District
Councilman Mark Conway, 4th District
Councilman James Torrence, 7th District
Councilman Kristerfer Burnett, 8th District

Councilman John T. Bullock, 9th District
Councilwoman Phylicia Porter, 10th District
Councilman Eric Costello, 11th District
Councilman Robert Stokes, Sr., 12th District
Councilman Tony Glover, 13th District
Councilwoman Odette Ramos, 14th District