



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

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**HB 1425 - Commercial Law - Earned Wage Access Services
House Economic Matters Committee
March 5, 2024**

OPPOSE

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 1425. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 300,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

We support workers receiving their wages promptly. We fully support employer connected entities that provide wage advancement at no cost and believe the ultimate solution to this issue is for workers to be paid fast, reliable, and predictable family sustaining wages. The National AFL-CIO in partnership with 118 other labor, civil rights, consumer, legal services and community organizations wrote a letter opposing efforts at the federal level, the so-called Earned Wage Access Consumer Protection Act, that would have similarly exempted earned wage access products from consumer lending protections and interest rate caps. We have attached this letter to our testimony.

HB 1425 does not limit the fees that workers will have to pay in order to access their wages early. HB 1425 does not classify earned wage access products as loans. HB 1425 does not require earned wage access companies to be licensed lenders. The bill permits earned wage access companies to ask for voluntary tips. From the National Consumer Law Center, “Tip based companies collect tips 73% of the time. Just three companies generated \$17.55 million in tip revenue plus another \$6.24 million in other fees, likely expedite fees, in 2021.” Unregulated earned wage access products that skirt Maryland’s consumer lending laws are not the temporary financial solution that workers need. Workers should not have to pay egregious tips, fees, or interest. The true cost of any loan or advance of money will be the total amount of money workers had to spend voluntarily or involuntarily to receive that loan.

We support this year’s HB 246 because workers deserve protection from lenders that fail to register or abide by Maryland’s lending laws and it ends the unfair and opaque tipping practices used by some earned wage access products.

Companies that are providing loans, regardless of whether they call themselves financial technology platforms, must follow Maryland’s lending rules and register with the Office of Financial Regulation. HB 1425 is ambiguous. It does not provide a path forward for earned wage access products to be safe,

reliable, and transparent for consumers. We urge an unfavorable report on HB 1425. Earned wage access products must register as lenders and follow Maryland's consumer lending protections.

**119 Labor, Civil Rights, Consumer, Legal Services
and Community groups and Academics**

November 28, 2023

Rep. Bryan Steil
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC, 20515

Re: Earned Wage Access Consumer Protection Act (oppose)

Dear Rep. Steil,

The 119 undersigned labor, civil rights, consumer, legal services and community groups and academics write to express our opposition to the draft Earned Wage Access Consumer Act. In the guise of offering protections, the bill obscures its true effect: **to exempt fintech cash advances from the Truth in Lending Act, to endorse a form of loan that makes workers pay to be paid, and to facilitate new evasions by payday lenders.** It is especially inappropriate to authorize a new class of fintech cash advances with costs imposed on low-wage workers, disproportionately impacting communities of color and women, when there are a growing number of options to obtain early pay at no cost

Earned wage advances are loans made to workers ahead of payday that are repaid on payday. The amount of the loan is tied to the wages that have been earned but are not due until payday. True earned wage advances are offered through employers, often with fees, but some employers offer early pay for free. Fake direct-to-consumer providers claim to be paying earned wages but have no connection to wages or payroll, are repaid by debiting bank accounts, and collect purportedly voluntary “tips.” Both models charge inflated expedite fees if the worker wants the advance quickly, which nearly everyone does.

California data based on nearly 6 million transactions shows how the costs of these advances add up.¹ Including all of the costs, **the average annual percentage rate (APR) for these advances is over 330%** for both the employer-based companies that charge fees and for the companies that collect “tips.” Tip-based companies collected tips 73% of the time. Just three companies generated \$17.55 million in tip revenue plus another \$6.24 million in other fees, likely expedite fees, in 2021. Workers get very little credit, with a typical advance of \$40 to \$100 for 10 days. The fees add up, as the average worker takes out 36 loans a year, and as many as 100.

The draft bill would obscure the relative cost of these fintech cash advances. It would exempt these loans from the Truth in Lending Act (TILA) and prevent the ability to compare high-cost earned wage advances to other credit options. It is no surprise that these fintech

¹ See National Consumer Law Center, [Data on Earned Wage Advances and Fintech Payday Loan “Tips” Show High Costs for Low-Wage Workers](#) (Apr. 10, 2023); Calif. Dep’t of Fin’l Prot’n & Innov., [2021 Earned Wage Access Data Findings](#) (Analysis completed Q1 2023) (“CA DFPI EWA Data”).

lenders, like traditional payday lenders, want to avoid disclosing a 330% APR, especially given the way the loans roll over and over. While the costs may vary, especially for the tip-based lenders, the apps through which the advances are made can easily adjust the APR to correspond to the amount of default tip that is inserted, or to any different amount that the consumer selects.

The bill would facilitate evasion by payday lenders. The bill’s definition of “earned wage access service” would extend to any loan that is “based on the consumer’s representations and the provider’s reasonable determination of the consumer’s earned but unpaid income.” That vague definition could easily be exploited by traditional payday lenders.

The bill perpetrates the myth that these fintech cash advances are not credit. The bill would be used to persuade state legislators to enact the model bill by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)² that would exempt these advances from state credit laws, including fee and rate caps. Asserting that these advances are not credit follows the path of traditional payday lenders, which established the payday loan industry by convincing legislators that their loans were not loans and fees were not interest but only a modest fee for deferring cashing of a check.

The bill would undermine or block coming guidance from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and facilitate new evasions by payday lenders. The bill purports to give the CFPB authority to regulate these advances, but the CFPB already has ample authority. Indeed, the CFPB has told the General Accounting Office that it plans to clarify the treatment of earned wage advances under TILA.³ The CFPB’s then-Acting General Counsel Seth Frotman warned two years ago that earned wage advances that charge any kind of fee, voluntary or not, “may well be TILA credit.”⁴ The bill would limit the CFPB’s options in how to ensure that consumers receive clear information and how to prevent evasions of federal lending laws.

The protections in the bill are not meaningful. The bill purports to offer a number of protections that would apply to fintech cash advances. But the bill largely codifies lenders’ current business model without adding significant new protections. Companies do not need to file civil suit, use third-party debt collectors or sell to debt buyers when they are able to collect 97% of the time through their stranglehold over the consumer’s paycheck or bank account.⁵ The

² See ALEC, [Earned Wage Access Act](#).

³ In a February 13, 2023 letter to the GAO, CFPB Director Rohit Chopra stated that he agreed with the recommendation that the CFPB issue clarification on the application of the TILA definition of “credit” for earned wage access products other than the free ones covered by the CFPB’s November 2020 advisory opinion. See Appendix III to U.S. GAO, [Financial Technology: Products Have Benefits and Risks to Underserved Consumers, and Regulatory Clarity Is Needed](#) (March 2023). Director Chopra said in a July 17 interview that he hopes to have a revised advisory opinion completed in 2024. See Evan Weinberg, Yun Park, Bloomberg Law, [States Set Collision Course Over Pay-on-Demand for Earned Wages](#) (Aug. 10, 2023).

⁴ [Letter from Seth Frotman to Beverly Brown Ruggia](#) et al. (Jan. 18, 2022).

⁵ See Financial Health Network, [“Earned Wage Access and Direct-to-Consumer Advance Usage Trends”](#) at 2 (April 2021) (finding that advances “were recouped successfully at least 97% of the time”); Calif. Dep’t of Fin’l Prot’n & Innov., Initial Statement of Reasons For The Proposed Adoption Of Regulations

bill requires compliance with the Electronic Fund Transfer Act, but the EFTA's ban on compulsory repayment of credit by preauthorized electronic fund transfer would not apply if the advances are not deemed to be credit. The bill limits certain repercussions of not tipping enough but does not stop all of the "multiple strategies that lenders use to make tips almost as certain as required fees."⁶

The costs of fintech cash advances fall primarily on low-wage workers who need a living wage, not a product that just makes them pay to be paid. Balloon-payment loans should not be exempted from credit laws, however they are styled, as they merely lead to a cycle of reborrowing where each advance repays the previous one without providing new liquidity.

For these reasons, we oppose the draft Earned Wage Access Consumer Act.

Yours very truly,

National

AFL-CIO

American Economic Liberties Project

American Federation of Teachers

Americans for Financial Reform

Center for Responsible Lending

Center for WorkLife Law

Coalition of Labor Union Women

Coalition on Human Needs

Consumer Action

Consumer Federation of America

Consumer Reports

Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

Impact Fund

MomsRising

NAACP

National Association of Consumer Advocates

National Center for Law and Economic Justice

National Community Action Partnership

National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)

National Employment Law Project

National Employment Lawyers Association

Under The California Consumer Financial Protection Law And The California Financing Law, California Deferred Deposit Transaction Law, And California Student Loan Servicing Act Pro 01-21 at 24-25 (March 17, 2023) ("These successful collection rates significantly exceed the rates of the DFPI's CFL and CDDTL licensees, who offer credit under those laws. Furthermore, such income-based advance models would be unsustainable if the majority of consumers did not repay providers, and providers employ language in advertising and consumer communications that reflects this reality. In light of these considerations, to consider earned wage access companies to be offering a product that is not credit would elevate form over substance.").

⁶ CA DFPI EWA Data at 61.

National Institute for Workers' Rights
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
Public Citizen
Public Counsel
Public Good Law Center
Public Justice
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice
U.S. PIRG
UnidosUS
20/20 Vision

Arizona

Center for Economic Integrity
Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Tucson Diocesan Council
UFCW Local 99

California

California Low-Income Consumer Coalition (CLICC)
Consumer Federation of California
Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy
Office of Kat Taylor
Prof. Alysson Snow, University of San Diego School of Law, Housing Rights Legal Clinic*
Public Law Center
Rise Economy (formerly California Reinvestment Coalition)

Colorado

Bell Policy Center
CoPIRG
Towards Justice

Connecticut

Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.
Prof. Annie Harper, Yale School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry*

Delaware

Delaware Community Reinvestment Action Council, Inc.

District of Columbia

Tzedek DC

Workplace Fairness

Florida

Florida Consumer Action Network

Georgia

Georgia Watch

Sur Legal Collaborative

Illinois

Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Indiana

Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute

Prosperity Indiana

Maine

Maine People's Alliance

Maine Small Business Coalition

Maryland

1199SEIU MD/DC

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Economic Action Maryland

Public Justice Center

Massachusetts

Sciencecorps

Minnesota

Minnesotans for Fair Lending

Nebraska

Nebraska Appleseed

Nevada

Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada

Nevada Coalition of Legal Service Providers

Nevada Legal Services, Inc.

New Jersey

BlueWaveNJ

Legal Services of New Jersey

New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center

New Jersey Citizen Action
NJ Time to Care Coalition

New York

Center for Elder Law & Justice
Cypress Hills Local Development Corp.
Empire Justice Center
Genesee Co-op Federal Credit Union
Mobilization for Justice
New Economy Project
New York StateWide Senior Action Council
New Yorkers for Responsible Lending
Strycker's Bay Neighborhood Council
Western New York Law Center

Ohio

Advocates for Basic Legal Equality
Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center
Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC
Prof. Cathy Lesser Mansfield, Case Western Reserve University School of Law*

Oklahoma

Voices Organized in Civic Engagement (VOICE)

Pennsylvania

Community Legal Services of Philadelphia
Justice at Work Pennsylvania

South Carolina

Columbia Consumer Education Council Inc
South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center

Texas

Brazos Valley Affordable Housing Corporation
BV Financial Fitness Center
cdcb | come dream. come build.
COPS/Metro Alliance
Dallas Area Interfaith
Equal Justice Center
RAISE Texas
Texas Appleseed
The Metropolitan Organization (TMO)
United Way of Central Texas
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas

United Ways of Texas
Valley interfaith

Virginia

Legal Aid Justice Center
Virginia Citizens Consumer Council
Virginia Poverty Law Center

Washington

Economic Opportunity Institute
Unemployment Law Project

*Organization listed for identification only.