



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony: Delegate Aaron Kaufman

HB 892 – Benefits Exploitation

For Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Testimony

Date: March 27, 2024

Good afternoon Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and esteemed colleagues. I am Delegate Aaron Kaufman, representing District 18, Montgomery County.

I am requesting a favorable report on HB 892 – Benefits Exploitation. This issue was brought to me by Baltimore Councilman Kristerfer Burnett. HB 892 would reclassify the exploitation of an individual for their benefits and expand Maryland Statutes – Criminal Law 8-524.

This bill passed out of the House Judiciary Committee with a vote of 20-0, with no unfavorable votes. HB 892 passed on the House floor 137 – 0 with bi-partisan support. HB 892 also has the support of Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, the Baltimore City Council, Prince George’s County Council, the Maryland States Attorneys Association and the Baltimore Jewish Council. The bill does not have any opposition.

Benefits Exploitation (this is the amended term, as this bill started with the term of benefits trafficking) is the systematic recruitment, harboring, neglect, and financial exploitation of elder and disabled adults who receive government benefits such as Social Security, Veteran's Benefits, Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP, TANF,

pension benefits, public assistance to adults, disability or other government benefits. Traffickers often pose as kind-hearted individuals offering to provide care for at-risk adults in an in-home setting. Once recruited, at-risk adults are stripped of their government benefits, held against their will, moved from location to location, and denied basic needs such as food, clothing, and adequate shelter. While Benefits Exploitation is a basic civil rights violation issue, it is also a growing public health issue. Victims of Benefits Exploitation are often the forgotten at-risk adults who have fallen through the cracks of various mental health systems, are unhoused, and no longer have a social support system in place. (Source: *National Institutes of Health Website nih.gov*)

This bill would prohibit a person from knowingly recruiting, harboring or transporting a person for the purpose of taking their government benefits through force and/or deceptive practices. This would make the exploitation of benefits using force, fraud, or coercion a form of human trafficking under Maryland's Criminal Code.

Benefits exploitation causes detrimental harm to individuals and their families and is deceptive and predatory behavior. This needs to be stopped. The State of Georgia already passed legislation regarding this crime in 2018. 23 other states have reported instances of this crime. Let Maryland be a leader and pass this bill to protect our precious citizens.

I ask for a favorable report on HB 892. Thank you very much. I am happy to answer any questions.