



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor



Richard J. Worley
Police Commissioner

BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT

TO: The Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Erin C. Murphy, Esq., Director of Government Affairs, Baltimore Police Dept.

RE: House Bill 0892- Criminal Law- Benefits Trafficking

DATE: February 20, 2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Bartlett, and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore Police Department supports House Bill 0892. This legislation aims to address the exploitation of government benefits as a form of human trafficking.

Benefits exploitation poses a multifaceted danger by harming individuals, eroding the effectiveness of social welfare programs, contributing to criminal activities, and undermining public trust. The legislation is necessary to address and prevent these dangers by providing a legal framework to prosecute those who exploit government benefits for personal gain. In some cases, benefits exploitation is linked to human trafficking, where vulnerable individuals are coerced, deceived, or forced into situations where their benefits are manipulated for the trafficker's gain. This not only violates the rights of the individuals involved but also contributes to criminal networks. The definition of "government benefits" under Section 3–1301(F) encompasses critical programs such as Social Security, Disability, Medicare, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Recognizing the diverse range of benefits is essential in addressing the various ways individuals may be exploited for personal gain.

House Bill 892 is a well-constructed and comprehensive response to the complex challenges associated with the exploitation of government benefits. By explicitly prohibiting the knowing recruitment, harboring, transportation, or obtaining of an individual for the purpose of appropriating government benefits, the legislation addresses a critical gap in our legal framework. The bill's emphasis on defining terms such as "coercion," "deception," "exploitation," and "isolation" provides clarity in understanding the various means by which individuals may be victimized. These definitions are crucial for investigators, prosecutors, and law enforcement agencies to identify, investigate, and build strong cases against those who engage in benefits trafficking. The incorporation of penalties outlined in Section 3–1302(B) underscores the gravity of benefits trafficking, with a felony charge carrying potential imprisonment up to 25 years or a fine not exceeding \$15,000, or both. These penalties are essential deterrents and reflect the severity of the harm caused by those who exploit individuals and their government benefits.

For these reasons, BPD respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 0892.