

## HB 892 Oral Testimony

Debra S. Holbrook MSN, RN SANE A, FNE A/P, AFN-C, DF-AFN, FAAN

Good Afternoon Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee.

My Name is Debra Holbrook and for 16 years I have been the Director of Forensic Nursing for Baltimore City at Mercy Medical Center. My role is to care for patients who are victims of trauma across the lifespan, with one of those sub-sets being victims of Human Trafficking. Through our Presidential Award winning Blue Dot Initiative we have cared for 700 victims of sex, labor, familial, child and elder trafficking in the last 6 years. The victims of elder trafficking are among the most tragic – and generally stem from financial exploitation.

We see numbers growing from familial financial trafficking where adult children move into their parent's home, then move in their families, take over their parent's finances, credit cards, bank accounts and social security and pension checks. We listen as they account being forced to work and their children keep the money. We listen as they tell us how the children do not pay the property taxes and they lose their homes and begin to live on the streets.

Worse are the patients who have forms of memory loss and dementia who do not understand what is happening to them and still have a bond of love with their children. Those patients who wander the streets and come home to sit on the steps of the home they no longer own; whose children still cash their state and federal checks, yet leave their parents to the streets.

Worse even still are the patients in hospitals who are discharged to licensed care facilities – but who go missing and their families find them in condemned or deplorable living conditions – that are rodent infested. They are starving, often dying, and the owner of the “licensed care facility” has access to their state and federal checks and credit cards.

As more and more of us approach the age of vulnerability, and as none of us know whether we will fall prey to dementia and being exploited, we must act now to protect ourselves and our fellow citizens.

It sounds unreal, but I see it- weekly in my work. It is raw, and tragic, and must be stopped. HB 892 will criminalize these acts which often begin with knowingly stealing government benefit checks and profiting from the exploitation of our elders and most vulnerable persons.

I urge you to vote YES to HB 892 and stop benefits trafficking which is the gateway to other forms of trafficking including sex and labor.

Thank you.