

Sponsor Testimony: Delegate Aaron Kaufman

HB 892

Benefits Trafficking Bill

Good afternoon Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and esteemed Judiciary Colleagues. I am Delegate Aaron Kaufman.

I am requesting a favorable report on HB 892 – Benefits Trafficking. This bill was brought forth by Baltimore Councilman Kristerfer Burnett. HB 892 would reclassify the exploitation of an individual for their benefits and expand Maryland Statutes – Criminal Law – Title 3 – Other Crimes Against the Person – adding benefits trafficking in subsection 13 and establishing this form of exploitation as a form of human trafficking.

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, 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 Trafficking is a basic civil rights violation issue, it is also a growing public health issue. Victims of Benefits Trafficking 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. While I know this is not human trafficking in its defined form (ie trafficking for sex or prostitution), benefits trafficking is taking advantage of persons for money and targeting vulnerable populations.

Benefits trafficking 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.

Supporters: CHANA which assists persons who experience abuse and other forms of interpersonal trauma

Baltimore Jewish Council

Georgia Department of Human Services – GBI Crimes Against Disabled Adults and Elderly Task Force

Center for Hope

Baltimore Police Department