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An agency of The Associated

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Baltimore District

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 216 – Criminal Law – Benefits Exploitation Judiciary Committee January 27, 2026 Support

Background: House Bill 216 (HB216) would create the criminal offense of “benefits exploitation.” Benefits exploitation would make it a felony to knowingly recruit, harbor, transport or obtain an individual for the purpose of appropriating the government benefits of an individual for personal benefit or to benefit another through deception, coercion, exploitation, isolation or any other means. Government benefits include but are not limited to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans and Disability.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents the interests of CHANA, an agency of the Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore. CHANA is a domestic violence, sexual abuse, and elder abuse agency that serves Baltimore County and City. CHANA provides safety planning, supportive counseling, shelter, crisis intervention, case management and legal advocacy.

Elder abuse is an act or failure to act that causes harm to an older adult. One in 10 community-residing older adults report being abused and an article cited by the World Health Organization reported that elder abuse increased by 84% during the initial months of the pandemic. Elder abuse includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, medical and financial abuse or neglect and perpetrators of elder abuse are most often adult children or spouses. Acts of elder abuse extend throughout the criminal justice system to include assault, sexual assault, theft, fraud and other crimes, none of which sufficiently cover the exploitation of benefits.

CHANA has served older adult abuse victims for financial gain, including to receive their benefits. CHANA supported an older gentleman who was physically assaulted, deprived of food and falsely imprisoned in his basement. His abusive relatives only let him out for trips to the bank on the day after his pension and social security benefits were deposited. They then forced him to give the funds to them. To date, Maryland law does not specifically address the exploitation of older adults, such as this client, to gain access to their benefits.

We ask for a favorable report on SB216 so that our older adult clients can receive the full relief and protection that they truly need when their government benefits have been exploited.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.