



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

January 27, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
101 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0216 - CRIMINAL LAW - BENEFITS EXPLOITATION -
POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide favorable testimony for House Bill (HB 216).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, we empower Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities. The DHS Family Investment Administration (FIA) administers a variety of financial assistance programs affected by HB 216.

The bill would define "government benefits" to specifically include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF; administered in Maryland as Temporary Cash Assistance), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP), and Public Assistance to Adults (PAA). We believe SB 140 could reduce public benefit theft by creating an additional criminal charge that may deter thieves from exploiting individuals and families we serve. SB 140 would add to the State's efforts to prosecute thieves while we do everything we can to protect our customers' benefits.

Among the many first ever measures we've implemented since taking office is a number of security features, including the ability for customers to lock their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card while it is not in use. We introduced activity

alerts, which customers receive each time there is a transaction on their EBT card. Customers can detect and mitigate potential theft in real time. We also increased personal identification number (PIN) complexity.

We appreciate the addition of Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP) and Public Assistance to Adults (PAA) to the enumerated list of protected benefits. We disburse these cash assistance benefits on EBT cards. EBT cards are also used for TANF, SNAP, TDAP, and SUN Bucks benefits.

HB 216 criminalizes multiple means of achieving theft, including through deception, coercion, exploitation, or isolation. The bill demonstrates that Maryland takes seriously the exploitation of Marylanders and their critical safety net benefits. Additional and specific protections are necessary because Marylanders rely on cash benefits to pay for groceries to feed their families, keep the lights on, and pay other monthly expenses.

If you require additional information, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at justin.hayes1@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael Lopez', written in a cursive style.

Rafael López
Secretary