



The League of Life  
and Health Insurers  
of Maryland



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March 24, 2022

The Honorable Delores Kelley  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
3 East  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony  
for the Senate Finance Committee  
**In Support of**

**House Bill 305 – Financial Institutions – Presumption of Property Abandonment – Revisions**

Dear Chairman Kelley,

The League of Life and Health Insurers of Maryland, Inc. and The American Council of Life Insurers support House Bill 305 – Financial Institutions – Presumption of Property Abandonment – Revisions as amended by the House of Delegate and urge the committee to give the bill a favorable report.

Every state has an abandoned property law that applies to financial accounts, including investment accounts and banking accounts. These laws have been around since the 1800s. They were originally designed to serve a very important public purpose: if the financial institution holding the account for the owner loses touch with the owner, these laws establish a mechanism whereby the financial institution can turn the property over to the State. The State takes possession of the account and holds it in trust for the owner so, once the owner – or the owners’ heirs or beneficiaries – surface, the State can return the property to its rightful owner.

These laws are based on the premise that, when the financial institution loses touch with the account owner because the institution no longer has a valid address for the owner, turning the account over to the State will enable the State to use its “superior resources” – such as tax, voting, property, and drivers’ license records – to find the owner and reunite them with their property.

In the past, the financial institution was deemed to have lost contact with the owner of an account when mail sent by the institution to the owner was returned by the US Post Office to the institution as

“undeliverable.” For investment accounts, such as mutual fund accounts, it’s important to remember that federal law requires account statements to be sent to the owner of the account at least quarterly and tax forms are mailed at least annually. In other words, in any given year, a mutual fund company is sending mail to the account owner at least 4 or 5 times a year. If any of this mail is returned by the US Post Office as undeliverable, the mutual fund company knows right away that it may no longer have a valid address for the shareholder.

When this happens, rules under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 require the mutual fund to conduct searches of national data bases to try to find an updated address on the account owner. If the fund is successful, it can reestablish contact with the account owner. If it’s not successful, then it must start the State’s dormancy clock and, when that clock runs out, the property must be escheated to the state. In Maryland, this dormancy clock is three years.

As mentioned, this is the way the law used to be. Today, however, rather than deeming property abandoned by the owner when mail sent to the owner is undeliverable, Maryland considers the account abandoned if three years have passed without the owner of the account taking some affirmative action to contact the financial institution. This is true even though the owner remains at their address of record and is receiving all mail sent to that address from the financial institution. In other words, with Maryland’s “no contact” escheatment trigger, property must be turned over to the State even though there is no “lost” shareholder and no need for the State to use its “superior resources” to obtain a valid address for the account owner. The financial institution knows exactly where to find the owner – they’re at the address of record on the account. As a result, the public purpose these laws were designed to service doesn’t exist – the “superior resources” of the State are not needed to find the shareholder.

By using this “no contact” trigger instead of a “returned mail” trigger to deem an account abandoned, the State is deeming accounts abandoned on an arbitrary basis and this results in real harm to account owners and particularly to owners of investment accounts, like mutual funds. Indeed, this trigger imposes an affirmative duty on owners to continuously contact their financial institutions to avoid escheatment. Unfortunately, most account owners have no idea they have this duty and, as a result, they unknowingly risk having their accounts escheat. Once the account escheats, not only does the owner have to contact the state to try to recoup the account but, when they do so, they only get the cash value of the account as of the date it was liquidated.

Section 17-316 of Maryland’s unclaimed property law requires the State to liquidate all accounts within one year of their escheatment. Any interest earned on the liquidated proceeds goes to the State, not to the account owner.

Think about this for a mutual fund account. You could have an owner who purchased mutual funds with the intent to leave the account untouched while it continues to grow. The owner would be receiving his or her quarterly statements from the fund and, unless the owner moves or wants to make a change to the account, it would have no reason to contact the mutual fund company. In Maryland, such an owner is at risk of having the account deemed abandoned, turned over to the State, and liquidated. When the owner discovers the account no longer exists, the most the owner can get back is the value of the account as of the date it was liquidated. The shares held in the account, which have likely appreciated, are not returned to the owner. To re-establish the investment account, the owner will have to start over from scratch, open a new account with the fund company, and purchase shares at the current price. Moreover, the owner likely owes the IRS taxes and capital gains penalties for the account’s liquidation, even though it was liquidated without the owner’s consent. So the money to fund this new account is considerably diminished.

To end the real and significant harm caused to Maryland's citizens by the current abandoned property law, we strongly recommend that Sections 17-101, 17-301, and 17-304 of Maryland's law be amended to add a new trigger to the law. This new trigger will be in addition to the current "no contact" trigger. Under this additional trigger, so long as a financial institution has a valid address for the account's owner, the account cannot be presumed to be abandoned and it will not escheat to the State. The amendments adding this new trigger to the law will ensure that an account will not be presumed abandoned until the later of either the current "no contact" trigger or the new trigger based on mail sent to the account owner being "undeliverable" by the post office.

Amending the bill in this way is consistent with the most recent rewrite of the Revised Uniform Unclaimed Property Act, which was adopted by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL) in 2016. The NCCUSL Act included a returned mail standard based on evidence presented to it of the harm that comes from using a "no contact" trigger to escheat financial account.

For these reasons, the League and ACLI urge the committee to give House Bill 305 a favorable report.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Celentano", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Matthew Celentano  
Executive Director, League of Life and Health Insurers

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Foster", written in a cursive style.

Michelle Foster  
Regional Vice President, ACLI

cc: Members, Senate Finance Committee