

HB 996 - Consumer Protection – Consumer Council – Name Change and Other Modifications
Economic Matters Committee
February 27, 2024
Favorable

Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chair Crosby and members of the Economic Matters Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 996. My name is Linda Dorsey-Walker. I have been a member of the Consumer Council since 2020. This legislation will change the name of the Consumer Council to the Consumer Protection Commission.

What is the Consumer Council, why does it exist, and why do we seek this change?

What if I tell you that the Consumer Councils was established 50 years ago to study, track, measure, and control consumerism, which is the level of consumption in the United States. Consumer Council members are the people with a special background in logistics, consumption and supply chain management. Sounds good ,right? However, that is not the work of the Consumer Council.

Fifty years ago, at the start of the modern “consumer era” it became evident that there was a need to provide consumers who had increased spending power information about the most economical and popular choices to make in each product area. Hence the establishment of Consumer Councils. However, that is not the purpose of the Consumer Council either.

You see the problem is that the average Marylander has no clue what the Maryland Consumer Council does or why we exist.

The fact is, the Maryland Consumer Council, now in its 50th year under the Office the Attorney General does not have an identity because our name is so very non-descript. It is not until we state that we are an advisory council to the Consumer Protection Division of the OAG that most people have some notion of what we do relative to consumers.

The Consumer Council is a body of nine citizens appointed to serve four years like most boards or commissions, but six years on a council with a very nondescript name.

The Consumer Council is charged with providing oversight, advice, and advocacy for the OAG's Consumer Protection Division. Thousands of citizens contact the Consumer Protection Division each year. They understand that the Consumer Protection Division allows consumers who believe their rights have been violated an outlet for filing a complaint, launching an investigation when appropriate, and seek legal and sometimes monetary remedy.

While the Council members are not directly involved with the grievance process, some of the issues and initiatives with which we have recently become involved are:

- Advocating for legislation to establish a statewide online Clearinghouse for residents governed HOA or Common Ownership Communities to know their rights and responsibilities under the law and provide best practice for COC Property Management Companies
- Ban the use of weight loss supplements to minors
- Paid leave and fair wages for tip workers / increase frequency of food inspections
- Strengthen consumer protection laws regarding used car dealerships companies
- Making the Narcan over the widely distributed, accessible to minors and available without prescription.

I ask you to return a favorable report for HB 996