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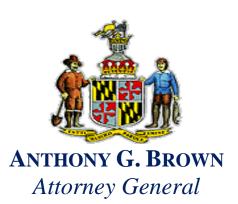
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Consumer Protection Division

STATE OF MARYLAND

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION

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February 27, 2024

TO: The Honorable C.T. Wilson, Chair

Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Steven M. Sakamoto-Wengel

Consumer Protection Counsel for Regulation, Legislation and Policy

RE: House Bill 996 – Consumer Protection – Consumer Council – Name

Change and Other Modifications (SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT)

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General (the "Division") supports House Bill 996, sponsored by Delegate White Holland, and offers an amendment to the bill. House Bill 996 would change the name of the Consumer Council of Maryland to the Consumer Protection Commission.

The Consumer Council is an advisory body to the Consumer Protection Division, established by statute fifty years ago, with nine members appointed by the Governor, with 3 representing businesses, 3 representing consumers, and 3 representing the public. The Chief of the Division is an *ex officio* member. Among other things, the Council studies issues facing Maryland consumers and can issue reports and recommendations regarding those issues. The Council members also serve as liaisons between the Division and the sectors and organizations they represent and are encouraged to give talks about the Division and consumer protection to organizations and community groups.

The members of the Council determined that they can better perform those functions if the body's name is changed to the Consumer Protection Commission. In particular, the addition of "Protection" to the name might provide greater clarity to the role of the advisory body and facilitate the body's liaison functions.

The Division, however, has concerns about the provision to provide members with a Per Diem payment. Members are currently reimbursed for expenses incurred in connection with the Council, such as mileage and parking. However, the Division's budget does not include any

funding that would be available to pay members a Per Diem payment and we do not anticipate that any such funding would be included in the foreseeable future. The members of the Council have acted in a volunteer capacity since the advisory body's inception and a change in that status would require diversion of funds that otherwise would go toward providing services to consumers. We have spoken with Delegate White Holland and understand that she is willing to offer a sponsor amendment removing the Per Diem provision.

Accordingly, the Consumer Protection Division requests that the Economic Matters Committee give HB 996 a favorable report with the requested amendment.

cc: Members, Economic Matters Committee
The Honorable Jennifer White Holland
Stephanie Baker, Chair, Consumer Council