

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chairman Crosby, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with information so that you can make an informed decision about House Bill 0332, the Elder Fraud Prevention Act of 2025, introduced by Delegates Stewart and Griffith.

I am Detective Petty with the Montgomery County Police Department and am currently assigned to the Financial Crimes Section (FCS). I am a Certified Financial Crimes Investigator (CFCI) and a Certified Economic Crime Forensic Examiner (CECFE). I am one of six detectives in the unit, which includes our Sergeant, and we investigate complex financial crimes that occur in or have a nexus to Montgomery County, Maryland.

Beginning in July 2023, MCPD - FCS began seeing cases where elderly individuals were being contacted by scammers who would pose as United States government officials from agencies such as the Department of Treasury, Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and others. These scammers would advise elderly residents that they were victims of a crime and the government was going to assist in resolving the issues. The scammers instructed victims to liquidate their bank accounts, IRAs, 401(k)s, or any other account where their money was stored. In some instances, victims were directed to wire money domestically or internationally to an account they believed was controlled by the government. The scammers would then direct victims to purchase gold bars or place the cash in a box. They would then arrange for a courier, who is allegedly an agent of the specified government agency "helping" the victim, to come pick up the box and place it into the Department of Treasury's vault for safekeeping¹. The scammers instruct the victims not to discuss this with anyone, for if they do, it will be detrimental to the investigation. In reality, there is no investigation, and the victims never hear back from the scammers and lose all their money/gold. Due to the frequency of these crimes, in January 2024, the FBI issued an alert (Number: I-012924-PSA) warning the public.

From March 2024 through November 2024, I and the other detectives in FCS worked to arrest seven government imposter scam couriers who targeted nine victims across seven cases in Montgomery County. The victims ranged in age from 61 to 94 and included a mother/daughter victimized pair, a husband/wife victimized pair, victims of varying education levels, and retired professionals. While these victims have lost over \$6.2 million, our office successfully prevented them from losing an additional \$3.7 million through targeted operations. This is from just seven of the cases we've been able to work on thus far and doesn't represent all the cases we've received. I expect and intend to charge additional suspects in the coming months, and I foresee the same for any new cases we receive.

Investigation of the arrested couriers has confirmed that although they were engaged in the same scam, none of them were in direct contact with one another and were working with conspirators around the US and outside the US in call centers - this is an international scam. Because of that, we have since partnered with agents from the Department of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) to focus on identifying and shutting down criminal call centers.

Due to this scam's secrecy, none of the victims we've worked with have been able to recover any of the \$6.2 million. We have only been able to stop transactions in progress, preventing additional losses. The time between the victim wiring money to another account or to a gold company and notifying law

¹ Today, money is not stored in the Treasury Building located at 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, in Washington, D.C.

enforcement of the scam has always been too long for us to recover assets unless it's frozen by the financial institution.

The challenge with financial crimes against aging individuals is that they are typically retired and living off a fixed income or their savings. When a scammer targets them and depletes their assets, there is almost always a domino effect on the victim, not just financially but also mentally, emotionally, and sometimes physically. Therefore, any effort to assist victims in recovering any or all their assets lost due to a scam is worthy of consideration. I appreciate the opportunity to share these insights and look forward to supporting the committee in advancing this important issue. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional details.

Respectfully,

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