

January 17, 2025

**The Honorable C. T. Wilson**  
**Chair of the House Economic Matters Committee**  
**Maryland State Legislature**  
**230 Taylor House Office Building**  
**Annapolis, Maryland 21401**

**Re: ETA Opposition to HB 29**

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Electronic Transactions Association (ETA), the leading trade association representing the payments industry, I appreciate the opportunity to express our concerns regarding HB 29. Collectively, ETA members process \$47 trillion annually, operating within an efficient and effective payments system. Significant changes, such as removing portions of interchange, pose risks to innovation and system security—both of which are partially funded through interchange fees.

**Examples From Other States:** The unworkable nature of the proposal is emphasized by the fact that over 60 similar proposals to prohibit interchange on the sales tax portion of electronic transactions have been considered between 2006 and 2024 and all but one have failed to pass their respective state legislature. The unintended consequences of such a policy change are not known.

- **Illinois:** Illinois is the only state to pass similar legislative language during the late-night closing hours of its 2024 session. A lawsuit filed by the Illinois Bankers Association and the Illinois Credit Union Leagues resulted in a preliminary injunction protecting federally chartered banks from the law's implementation. However, the partial ruling still allows the new law to apply to state-chartered banks and credit unions harming the smallest financial institutions in the state. Experts estimate compliance costs ranging from hundreds of millions to \$10 billion, requiring years to develop new technologies and encourage adoption.
- **Georgia:** In 2024, the Georgia House of Representatives convened a legislative study committee to study the issue, focusing on swipe fees and interchange fees. After thorough analysis, the committee recommended reforming its vendor compensation program rather than removing interchange fees from the sales tax portion of transactions.
- **Tennessee:** The Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) studied the costs associated with interchange fees on tax portions of transactions. In its December 2024 report, the Commission advised Tennessee to refrain from action until more information became available.

**Impact on Consumers and Employees:** Proponents of HB 29 argue that removing sales tax from interchange fees would save consumers money. However, there is no guarantee that merchants would pass these savings on to consumers, as many costs are already embedded in existing pricing structures.

- **Service Disruptions:** Consumers would experience immediate inconveniences and inefficiencies resulting from the disruption of an otherwise efficient and secure payments ecosystem.
- **Checkout Complications:** Consumers may face challenges such as:
  - Inability to use their card for certain transactions.
  - Requirement to pay taxes and gratuities separately, potentially in cash.
  - Slower checkout times and reduced satisfaction, particularly for purchases with varying tax rates (e.g., groceries).
- **Decreased Rewards:** Consumers risk losing valuable benefits, such as airline miles, cashback, and loyalty program rewards, which are funded in part by interchange fees.
- **Loss of Privacy:** Compliance with HB 29 would necessitate the collection and auditing of itemized transaction data by payments companies to ensure accurate tax calculations. This would compromise the current level of privacy consumers enjoy regarding their purchase details.
- **Pass-Through Costs:** Merchants may pass the significant costs of implementation—such as compliance and technology updates—directly to consumers through increased prices.

**Impact to Small Businesses:** While big box retailers may be able to adjust their systems more readily to comply with the bill's requirement of providing additional sales tax information, small merchants who currently use a point-of-sale (POS) terminal with more limited functionality would need new software and, in most cases, new hardware, costing them additional money up front. The ability for small businesses to offer a multitude of payment options is critical to their ability to compete with big-box retailers, give their customers the options they desire, and remain flexible in times of crisis. Small businesses would bear the greatest burden of implementing HB 29 due to the cost and complexity of compliance.

- **Technology Upgrades:** Unlike larger retailers, small merchants using basic point-of-sale (POS) terminals would need to invest in new hardware and software to meet the bill's requirements.
- **Administrative Costs:** Compliance would require new processes, increased audits, and extensive employee training, further straining small businesses financially and operationally.
- **Out-of-State Transactions:** Small businesses would also face additional challenges developing systems to accommodate transactions originating from outside the state.

**Development of entirely new technology:** The current interchange fee model is based on the final purchase amount, without specific data on goods, services, or applicable tax rates. While payment networks have developed advanced tools to aid merchants—such

as POS systems that calculate and apply tax rates for specialty items—HB 29 would require entirely new technology and new separate Maryland based payment network separated from the global payment network to capture state sales tax, gratuity amounts, and itemized receipt data.

**Creation of Privacy Issues:** Implementing HB 29 would mandate the acquisition and storage of detailed transaction data, including SKU-level information, by the payments industry. This level of granularity, currently not collected, raises significant privacy concerns for consumers. Each transaction would need to be itemized and audited to ensure compliance with state and local tax requirements, eroding the privacy of individual purchases.

**The benefits of interchange:** Interchange fees are a cornerstone of the payments ecosystem, enabling secure, fast, and reliable electronic transactions.

- **For Consumers:** Interchange fees fund consumer benefits like cashback, rewards programs, and the research and development of innovative payment technologies.
- **For Merchants:** These fees support fraud detection and prevention, ensure system reliability, and provide access to critical services that drive customer convenience and satisfaction.

Interchange rates are market-driven, competitive, and negotiable, enabling businesses to secure terms suited to their needs. Over time, competition has naturally lowered interchange costs, ensuring affordability while supporting the infrastructure necessary for a robust and secure payment system.

**Conclusion:** The creation of a new Maryland based payment network separated from the global payment network under the requirements of HB 29 would have significant adverse effects on both small businesses and consumers. Small business owners would face substantial financial and operational burdens to comply with the new mandates, while consumers would likely bear the cost of these changes through increased prices and diminished benefits.

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We appreciate you taking the time to consider this important issue. More information is located on the next page. If you have any questions or wish to discuss further, please contact me.

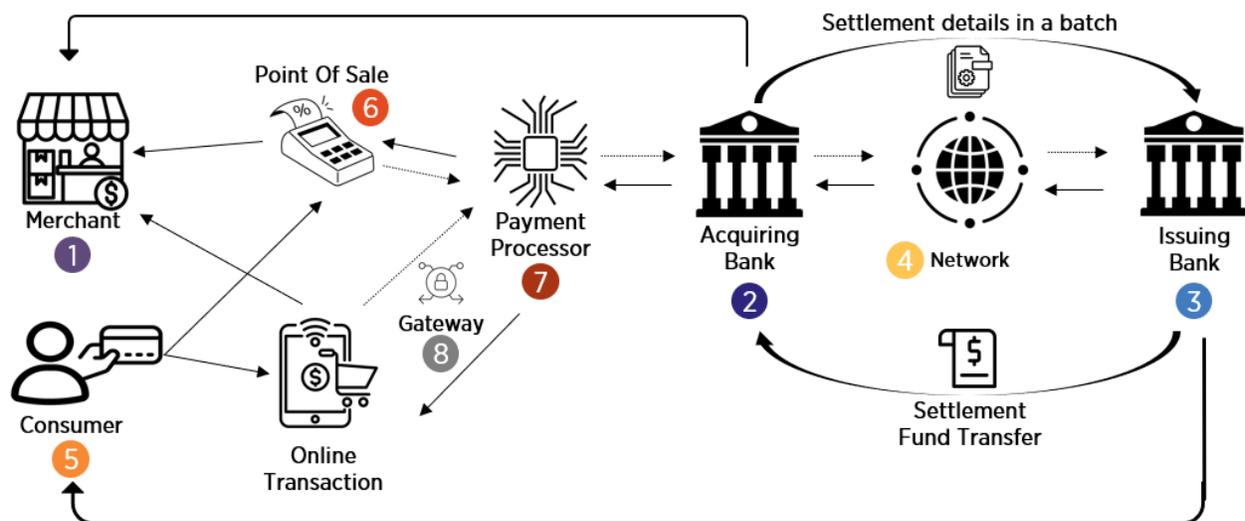
Respectfully,



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## Overview of The Payments Ecosystem

**Summary:** The payments industry has remained at the forefront of developing innovative payment technology, providing merchants and consumers with safety, security, speed, and ease for transacting electronic payments, not to mention increasingly numerous options for doing so. These developments are a result of many stakeholders acting seamlessly and in unison across a complex ecosystem that processes payments. Each of the stakeholders below provides valuable and essential services to merchants and/or consumers.



- 1 **Merchants:** provide goods or services and agree to accept credit and/or debit cards according to their merchant and processing agreements with their acquirer; receive payment details through point of sale systems, or online; when a merchant makes a sale using a customer's electronic payment card, the system that processes the transaction recognizes only the final purchase amount on which interchange is based.
- 2 **Merchant acquirers:** provide access to payment networks and presents transaction information from merchants to payment networks.
- 3 **Issuing entities:** financial institution or commercial entity that provides consumers with a payment instrument (such as a credit or debit card).
- 4 **Payment networks:** exchange data between card issuing entities and merchant acquiring entities and settles payments.
- 5 **Consumers:** hold payment instruments and participate in the marketplace.
- 6 **Point of Sale (POS) systems:** electronic equipment used for pricing and recording transactions, which can be in the form of software, hardware, or combination; these systems DO NOT provide detailed transaction information, (e.g., items bought, tax rate), to neither acquirers or card networks.
- 7 **Processors:** provide payment processing across the payment network; may be an acquirer, and may, in some cases, serve both the acquiring and issuing sides of a transaction.
- 8 **Gateways:** an internet-based service that transports credit card information from a computer terminal or website to a credit card processor.