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BILL NO: SB 170

TITLE: Criminal Law -Benefits Exploitation

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

HEARING DATE: January 8, 2025

POSITION: Favorable

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alicia Bickoff. I am the Deputy Director of CHANA, an agency of the Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore. I am testifying in favor of SB 170. CHANA is a domestic violence, sexual abuse, and elder abuse agency that serves Baltimore County and City. CHANA provides safety planning, supportive counseling, shelter, crisis intervention, case management and legal advocacy.

Elder abuse is an act or failure to act that causes harm to an older adult. One in 10 community-residing older adults report being abused and an article cited by the World Health Organization reported that elder abuse increased by 83% during the initial months of the pandemic. Elder abuse includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, medical and financial abuse or neglect and perpetrators of elder abuse are most often adult children or spouses. Acts of elder abuse extend throughout the criminal justice system to include assault, sexual assault, theft, fraud and other crimes, none of which sufficiently cover the exploitation of benefits.

CHANA has served older adult who have been abused victims for financial gain, including to receive their benefits. CHANA supported an older gentleman who was physically assaulted, deprived of food and falsely imprisoned in his basement. His abusive relatives only let him out for trips to the bank on the day after his pension and social security benefits were deposited. They then forced him to give the funds to them. To date, Maryland law does not specifically address the exploitation of older adults, such as this client, to gain access to their benefits. CHANA supports this bill.

We ask you to support this bill so that our older adult clients can receive the full relief and protection that they truly need when they have been abused and their benefits have been exploited.