



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

January 21, 2025

The Hon. Will Smith, Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB0170 - CRIMINAL LAW - BENEFITS EXPLOITATION -
POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide favorable testimony for SB 170.

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, we empower Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities. The Family Investment Administration (FIA) within our department administers a variety of financial assistance programs affected by SB 170.

We believe SB 170 could reduce public benefit theft by creating an additional criminal charge that may deter thieves from exploiting individuals and families we serve. SB 170 would add to the State's efforts to prosecute thieves while we do everything we can to protect our customer's benefits. Among measures we've implemented since we took office is a new system feature enabling customers to lock their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card while it is not in use. We also increased personal Identification number (PIN) complexity and instituted activity alerts so customers can detect and mitigate potential theft in real time.

We appreciate the addition of Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP) and Public Assistance to Adults (PAA) to the enumerated list of protected benefits. We disburse these cash assistance benefits on EBT cards. EBT cards are also used for

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which Maryland calls Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

SB 170 clearly identifies as criminal means of achieving theft including through deception, coercion, exploitation, or isolation. The bill could help to prosecute thieves who target Marylanders. Additional and specific protections are necessary because Marylanders rely on cash benefits to pay for groceries to feed their families, keep the lights on, and supplement other monthly expenses.

If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael López', written over the printed name.

Rafael López
Secretary