

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Economic Matters Committee

Maryland General Assembly

Regarding: HB0994 The “Don’t You Worry (Wurie) Act” – Seller of Travel Registration

Position: OPPOSE

Submitted by: Jonathan G. Harris, A Maryland Consumer of Travel Services

11932 Goya Drive

Potomac, MD 20854-3313

Jgharris7@gmail.com

(240)506-2864

I submit this testimony in opposition to the Don’t You Worry (Wurie) Act. As a Maryland resident and active consumer of travel services, I have serious concerns that this legislation would reduce access to travel options for Marylanders, impose undue burdens on small travel businesses, and create criminal liability for informal community arrangements — all without evidence that the benefits justify these costs.

I have personal experience with exactly the kinds of trips this bill would put at risk. Among my travels, I have taken a trek through Patagonia and a photography tour of Ladakh, in the Indian Himalayas. Both trips were led by solo operators — single-person businesses with clients drawn from around the world. These trips offered exceptional, specialized experiences that simply are not available through large commercial travel agencies. They operate on thin margins, serve a small number of clients per year, and depend on word-of-mouth and international reputation rather than state-by-state regulatory compliance.

I. The Act Would Reduce Travel Options for Marylanders

Because travel is inherently sold across geographic boundaries, many small operators — those offering specialty treks, adventure tours, hiking expeditions, and niche trips — serve customers drawn from across the country and around the world, and may have only a handful of Maryland clients at any given time. The Act would require these businesses to register regardless of how few Maryland residents they serve.

The operators who led my Patagonia trek and my Ladakh photography tour are precisely the businesses this bill would sweep in. Each was a one-person operation with an international clientele. Neither had reason to know which U.S. states have seller of travel laws, and neither had the legal staff or administrative capacity to monitor and comply with a patchwork of state registration requirements. If Maryland passes this Act, the rational business decision for operators like these is simply to stop accepting Maryland clients. I would lose access to the kinds of trips I value most — and so would other Marylanders.

In practice, small operators will likely conclude that the cost and legal exposure of registration is not worth serving one or two Marylanders per year. This outcome is not hypothetical: travel companies already post disclaimers that their services are unavailable to residents of states with seller of travel registration laws. For example:

“TGKTravelDesigns.com is not registered as a Seller of Travel in California, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, or Washington. Some of our services may not be available to residents of these states.”

“RelaxingVacations.com is not registered as a Seller of Travel in California, Hawaii and Washington and does not sell travel nor market to residents of those states.”

If Maryland enacts this law, these disclaimers will expand to include Maryland. Consumers — not businesses — will bear the consequence.

II. The Act Would Criminalize Ordinary Hiking Club Customs

A widespread and well-understood practice in hiking and outdoor communities is for a group of participants to pool money and present the trip organizer with a gift card as thanks for the significant time and effort involved in planning. Under a broad reading of this Act, that informal arrangement would constitute an illegal sale of travel services, subjecting ordinary citizens to liability for a common act of community appreciation.

The Committee should consider whether the legislature intends to reach this far into private civic and recreational life.

III. Other States Have Found These Laws Ineffective and Repealed Them

The legislative record does not appear to include any evidence quantifying the amount of consumer fraud that seller of travel registration laws actually prevent. This absence of data is significant, because multiple states have already conducted that analysis and reached the same conclusion: the burdens imposed by these laws are not justified by the consumer protection benefits they deliver.

Nevada, Iowa, Oregon, Ohio, and Rhode Island have each repealed their seller of travel registration laws. Maryland should learn from their experience before creating a new registration system that those states found did not work.

IV. Maryland Has More Targeted Alternatives

If the Committee’s goal is to protect consumers from fraudulent travel sellers, registration is a blunt instrument. Maryland already has fraud statutes that can be strengthened without creating a new regulatory apparatus. Specifically, the General Assembly could:

- Make it a criminal offense to accept payment for travel services and willfully fail to deliver those services, particularly where the failure results from gross negligence and the seller does not provide a refund within a reasonable period; and
- Strengthen civil remedies for consumers who suffer such harm.

This approach would target bad actors directly, without burdening the vast majority of legitimate small operators or reducing travel access for Maryland consumers.

Conclusion

For the reasons above, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose the Don’t You Worry (Wurie) Act. The bill would restrict travel options for the very Maryland consumers it purports to

protect, criminalize informal community practices, and replicate a registration model that multiple other states have concluded does not work. Targeted fraud enforcement is a superior and more proportionate approach.

Respectfully submitted,

A Maryland Consumer of Travel Services