

**HB 191\_MD Center on Economic Policy\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kali Schumitz

Position: FAV

# Taking Down Payment Barriers Would Ensure Maryland's Economy Remains Inclusive

## Position statement in support of House Bill 191

*Given before the House Economic Matters Committee*

In recent years there has been a growing trend of retailers declining to accept cash payments. This practice raises barriers that make it harder for many to purchase necessities, and these barriers are often highest for Marylanders of color, families surviving on low incomes, and people with disabilities. Ensuring Marylanders can purchase the things they need with cash will foster an inclusive economy. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 191.**

About 79,000 Maryland households did not have a bank account in 2023, according to data from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.<sup>i</sup> Another 284,000 had a bank account but sometimes relied on expensive financial institutions like check cashing services and payday lenders. For people with little or no access to mainstream financial institutions, cash is often the only option for buying necessities like food or clothing. **Ensuring these Marylanders can meet their needs with the form of money they have is essential to make our economy inclusive.**

While Marylanders of all backgrounds may be without a bank account, those who already face discrimination or other economic roadblocks are especially likely to rely "cash."<sup>iii</sup>

- Between 2019 and 2023, about 19% of Maryland households with annual income under \$30,000 did not have a bank account (they were "unbanked"), compared to less than 1% of those with annual income over \$75,000.
- About 9% of Black-led households were unbanked during the same period, compared to only 1% of white households. Other racial and ethnic groups are not individually reported in the FDIC data due to small sample size but, taken together, 5% of these households were unbanked.
- About 18% of households led by a working-age person with a disability were unbanked, compared to only 4% of other working-age households.
- About 8% of households led by a Marylander who was not a United States citizen were unbanked, compared to only 4% of households led by a person born in the United States.
- While aging adults are not among those most likely to be unbanked, retailers report that they are more likely to prefer cash or be uncomfortable with electronic payment methods.<sup>iv</sup>

Requiring retailers to accept cash would put Maryland in good company:

- Last year, New York passed legislation requiring all grocery stores and other retailers to accept cash.<sup>v</sup>
- Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Berkeley, California, required acceptance of cash in 2019.<sup>vi</sup>
- New Jersey has required retailers across the state to accept cash since 2019.

- Massachusetts has prohibited rejection of cash for decades.

Following the lead of other states and ensuring that Marylanders can buy necessities using cash will help foster an inclusive economy.

**For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Economic Matters Committee make a favorable report on House Bill 191.**

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## Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 191

### *Bill summary*

House Bill 191 would require vendors in Maryland to accept payment in cash.

### *Background*

News reports have documented an increasing number of stores and restaurants going “cashless,” or accepting only cards or electronic payment.<sup>vii</sup> This trend began before 2020 but accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued since then. A number of cities and states have passed legislation mandating that businesses accept cash payments.

### *Equity Implications*

Requiring acceptance of cash would benefit Marylanders who have inadequate access to financial services and therefore must rely on cash for most purchases. Research by the FDIC shows that people who face economic barriers or discrimination because of factors like their race or a disability are less likely to have a bank account:<sup>viii</sup>

- Between 2019 and 2023, about 19% of Maryland households with annual income under \$30,000 did not have a bank account (they were “unbanked”), compared to less than 1% of those with annual income over \$75,000.
- About 9% of Black-led households were unbanked during the same period, compared to only 1% of white households. Other racial and ethnic groups are not individually reported in the FDIC data due to small sample size, but taken together, 5% of these households were unbanked.
- About 18% of households led by a working-age person with a disability were unbanked, compared to only 4% of other working-age households.
- About 8% of households led by a Marylander who was not a United States citizen were unbanked, compared to only 4% of households led by a person born in the United States.
- While aging adults are not among those most likely to be unbanked, retailers report that they are more likely to prefer cash or be uncomfortable with electronic payment methods.<sup>ix</sup>

### *Impact*

House Bill 191 would likely **improve racial, economic, and disability equity** in Maryland.

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<sup>i</sup> MDCEP analysis of FDIC 2023 data on household use of banking and financial services, <https://household-survey.fdic.gov/>

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- iii MDCEP analysis of 2019–2023 FDIC banking survey five-year estimates, <https://household-survey.fdic.gov/>
- iv Liz Alderman, “Our Cash-Free Future Is Getting Closer,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2020
- v Shane O’Brien, “New York Passes Bill Requiring Stores to Accept Cash Payments, Protecting Unbanked and Low-Income Shoppers,” *QNS*, 2025, <https://qns.com/2025/06/cash-payments-to-protect-unbanked-shoppers/>
- vi Ann Carrns, “Who Gets Hurt When the World Stops Using Cash,” *The New York Times*, September 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/11/your-money/cash-credit-cards-coronavirus.html>
- vii Alderman, 2020  
Carrns, 2020
- viii 2019–2023 FDIC data on household use of banking and financial services, <https://household-survey.fdic.gov/>
- ix Liz Alderman, “Our Cash-Free Future Is Getting Closer,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2020

## **2.06 HB 191- Consumer Protection - Retail Transact**

Uploaded by: Lonia Muckle

Position: FAV



**HB 191 - Consumer Protection - Retail Transactions - Cash Payments**  
**House Economic Matters Committee**  
**February 10, 2026**  
**SUPPORT**

Chair Valderrama, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 191. This bill requires certain businesses to accept cash as a form of payment and protects unbanked and underbanked consumers who are more likely to use cash.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

HB 191 requires certain businesses to accept cash as a form of payment, ensuring that unbanked and underbanked Marylanders are not excluded from accessing everyday goods and services. This bill is a necessary consumer protection that promotes equity, financial inclusion, and economic fairness for low-income individuals and families across the state.

Despite the growing use of electronic payments, cash remains a critical tool for millions of households. The 2023 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households reports that 5.6 million (4.2%) households in the U.S. are unbanked, or do not have a bank account.<sup>1</sup> In Maryland, this drops, only slightly, to 2.4%.<sup>1</sup> For this report and several previous reports, "Don't have enough money to meet minimum balance requirements" was the most common response when asked why people do not have a bank account.<sup>1</sup>

For unbanked individuals, navigating daily financial life is significantly more expensive. Fees accumulate at every turn: check-cashing fees to access wages, money order fees to pay rent or utilities, and higher costs or outright exclusion from credit, loans, and safe savings tools. Businesses that refuse cash payments ask low income customers to increase this burden by expecting them to pay additional fees for "pay-as-you-go" or similar cards just to be able to purchase goods or services.

Through our work with clients, CASH knows that people with an income lower than \$20,000 a year are more likely to have less access to traditional banking. Furthermore, the rates of unbanked are several times higher among Black and Brown households in comparison to their white counterparts.<sup>1</sup> An outright ban on cash discriminates against those without credit or bank accounts, likely those who are low-income, homeless, or undocumented.

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<sup>1</sup> FDIC. (2023). <https://www.fdic.gov/household-survey>



This bill protects consumers, promotes fairness, and helps ensure Maryland's economy works for everyone. A cashless payment can be one option among many, but it should never be the sole option.

**Thus, we encourage you to return a favorable report for HB 191.**

*Creating Assets, Savings and Hope*

# **HB191 Cash payment EconAction FAV.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Marceline White

Position: FAV



**HB191 Consumer Protection-Retail Transactions-Cash Payments  
Position: Favorable**

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Kris Valderrama, Chair  
Economic Matters Committee  
Room 230, House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
cc: Members, House Economic Matters

Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee:

Economic Action Maryland Fund is here in support of HB191.

HB191 requires in-person merchants to accept cash for goods or services of \$300 or less.

Economic Action Maryland's direct service programs focusing on older adults, tenants, and fair housing serve approximately 2000 Marylanders every year. For many Marylanders who struggle to make ends meet, cash remains king.

In fact 22% of Maryland households are un-or-underbanked making them more reliant on cash than other households<sup>1</sup>. In the past few years inflation, high interest rates, and the rising cost of living created a perfect storm, leading to 32% of individuals maxing out their credit cards<sup>2</sup>. Taken together, it is clear that many Maryland households may need or prefer to use cash, thus avoiding high credit card interest rates.

HB191 provides some exceptions for certain kinds of businesses but allows Marylanders to choose how they would like to pay for goods and services.

For these reasons, we urge your favorable report on HB191.

Best,

Marceline White  
Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> [Bankonmaryland](https://www.bankofamerica.com/banking/ordinary-americans-are-feeling-the-strain-of-record-high-us-credit-card-debt/)

<sup>2</sup><https://internationalbanker.com/banking/ordinary-americans-are-feeling-the-strain-of-record-high-us-credit-card-debt/>

*Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.*

# **HB0191 - Consumer Protection - Retail Transaction**

Uploaded by: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus

Position: FAV



## MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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DENI TAVERAS, TREASURER  
JOE VOGEL, SECRETARY  
JASON A. AVILA GARCIA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Delegate Kriselda Valderrama, Chair  
Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, Vice Chair  
Economic Matters Committee Members  
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus  
DATE: 2/10/2026  
RE: HB0191 - Consumer Protection - Retail Transactions - Cash Payments

### **The MLLC supports HB0191 - Consumer Protection - Retail Transaction - Cash Payments**

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0191.

Merchants prohibiting cash payments in retail transactions leads to prejudicial effects on Latino and Hispanic individuals. Many Hispanics households throughout the nation are unbanked, meaning that without cash payments, they may not be able to purchase certain goods. According to FDIC, in 2023, while Hispanic households comprised only about 15% of all U.S. households, they made up for 33.4% of unbanked households.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, even if they are banked, immigration enforcement operations continue to expand with new data tracking mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> As a result, it is unclear whether financial data is sufficiently safeguarded from federal overreach. So, Latino and Hispanic individuals may not be able to participate in the purchase of goods if they are unbanked, but even if they are banked, and are required to use a bank card, they may then be vulnerable to immigration enforcement actions.

Generally, this bill would help this by prohibiting merchants from disallowing cash payments. Specifically, this bill prohibits a merchant from (1) prohibiting a person from making a cash payment for a good or service; (2) requiring a person to buy a good or service with a credit or debit card; or (3) charging or collecting a fee from someone making a cash payment for a good or service. If a merchant violates any part of this bill, it would be deemed an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice subject to punishment under the Maryland Consumer Protection Act (“CPA”). Ultimately, by prohibiting merchants from restricting cash payments and making it a violation of the CPA to do such, Latino and Hispanic individuals will be more able to participate in, and be better protected when engaging in, the consumer marketplace..

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB0191.

<sup>1</sup> [2023 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households](#)

<sup>2</sup> [ACLU DHS is Circumventing Constitution by Buying Data It Would Normally Need a Warrant to Access](#)

# **Cashless Business Testimony 2026 MD.pdf**

Uploaded by: Meryl Chertoff

Position: FAV

My name is Meryl Chertoff, and I am an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University Law Center teaching on state and local government public law. I am also the past director of the Georgetown Project on State and Local Government Policy and Law. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 191.

“We are cash-free” signs blast at some Maryland businesses. Who is hurt? Disproportionately, it is the unbanked and people of color. But it hurts everyone, because the more transactions we are forced to do cashless, the less privacy each one of us has.

Having cash in your pocket gives a person dignity. But today, even \$50 in your wallet may no longer buy you a cup of coffee, and it is not because prices have gone up at the corner coffee shop. It is because an increasing number of businesses in Maryland and around the country won't accept cash. The tech and financial services industries have decided they would prefer that the legal currency of the United States be unwelcome in a growing number of commercial establishments.

Around the country, advocates for consumer protection are responding with measures to protect Americans from yet another effort to make some of us second class citizens, and to harvest data from everyone else.

Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, Oregon and Rhode Island have enacted laws which, subject to some exceptions, require commercial establishments for transactions up to a certain amount. Local jurisdictions have done the same.

In New York City, for instance, a local ordinance prohibiting food stores and retail establishments from refusing cash payments goes into effect in March of 2026. These stores are also barred from charging higher prices to customers who pay with physical money rather than cards. Washington, DC has begun to enforce its own ordinance, after a delay during the pandemic. Proponents note that in DC, about 30 percent of residents are unbanked or underbanked.

Nationally, 30% of households with an income of under \$50,000 are unbanked. According to a [2023 FDIC survey](#) in Maryland, 3.4 percent of all residents are unbanked, with the proportion rising at the lower end of the household income scale. The current economic crisis will increase the number of unbanked households. Those households don't have credit and debit cards.

While being low-income is not itself a category protected by Federal civil rights laws, the fact that an increasing number of businesses are going cashless means that they effectively discriminate against those below the poverty line, and the working poor, especially people of color and undocumented immigrants.

The refusal of some commercial establishments to accept cash as payment also contributes to a sense that some are less equal citizens than others. Cash is an equalizer. It gives anyone holding it dignity. A cashless model creates two tiers of retail: those reserved exclusively for the banked and those where everyone else can shop, eat and receive basic services. Plain and simple, cashless perpetuates inequality.

Then there is the question of privacy. It is no surprise that the drivers of cashless business are largely big tech. For each transaction you do without cash, more data is harvested about your location, purchasing habits and preferences. A cash purchase-- be it of coffee, cigarettes or medicine-- allows you to maintain your anonymity. The swipe of a card lets someone, somewhere know what you have just bought. And if you think this sort of surveillance society based on your cashless purchases are far off, consider that in China, purchases are monitored and become part of the [social credit score](#) that determine your access to a variety of benefits.

Cashless means that the real world increasingly mirrors the online one: where every click, or in this case every swipe, allows the marketers to build a more granular profile of who you are. HB 191 is good for consumer privacy and for the dignity and financial viability of those in Maryland who are unbanked or underbanked.

# **HB 191 Consumer Protection - Retail Transactions -**

Uploaded by: Sara Westrick

Position: FAV



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**HB 191 – Consumer Protection - Retail Transactions - Cash Payments**  
**House Economic Matters Committee**  
**February 10, 2026**  
**FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and members of the House Economic Matters Committee. My name is Sara Westrick, Advocacy Director for AARP Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 191, legislation that protects Maryland consumers, especially older adults, by ensuring they can continue to use cash for everyday purchases. We thank Delegate Wims for sponsoring this important legislation.

AARP is the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing the interests of Americans age 50 and older and their families. Key priorities of our organization include helping all Marylanders achieve financial and health security, as well as supporting a safety net for older adults and low-income households in Maryland.

**Why HB 191 Matters for Older Marylanders**

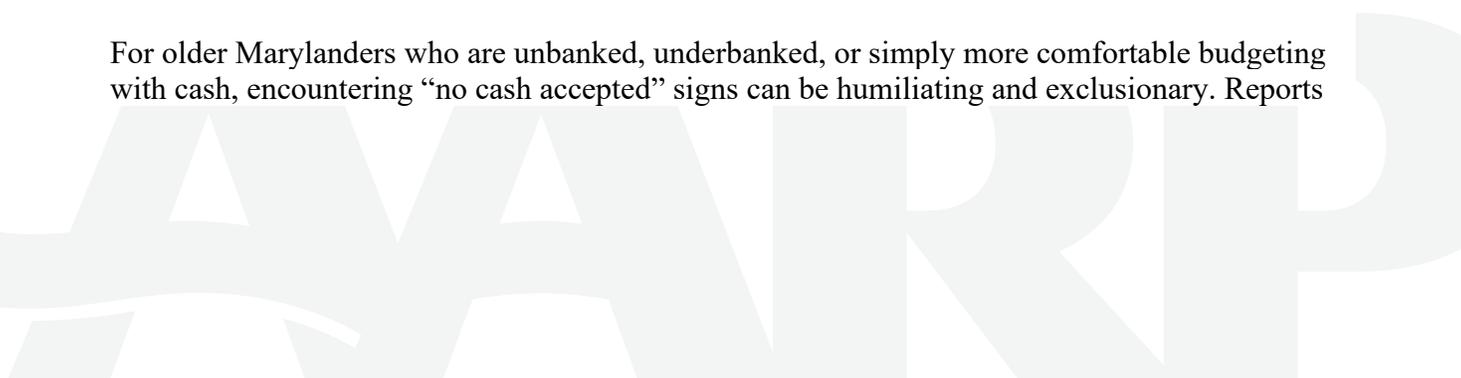
While digital payments have expanded rapidly, cash remains essential for a significant portion of Maryland’s older population. Many older adults rely on cash not simply by preference, but because of structural and technological barriers that make digital-only payment systems out of reach.

Older adults are disproportionately dependent on cash, and many older adults face barriers to digital systems. AARP national analysis of consumers age 45 and older shows that many are unbanked or underbanked, meaning they lack full access to credit cards, online banking, and digital payment tools. In addition, older adults with low incomes are much less likely to use traditional financial services, increasing their reliance on cash for daily transactions.

These findings underscore that for many older Marylanders, the option to use cash is not merely a convenience but a necessity.

Older adults also remain at increased risk of financial scams and digital fraud, and many are uncomfortable disclosing personal financial information during online or card-based transactions. AARP research has shown that limited technological comfort and security concerns push many older adults toward cash and other non-digital payment methods as safer alternatives.

For older Marylanders who are unbanked, underbanked, or simply more comfortable budgeting with cash, encountering “no cash accepted” signs can be humiliating and exclusionary. Reports



from constituents reflect instances where older adults were unable to complete purchases of groceries, pharmacy items, and other personal care items.

HB 191 protects consumers by restoring the principle that lawful U.S. currency can buy the things you need. This bill requires merchants to accept cash for in-person retail transactions of \$5 to \$300 and prohibits cash-related fees.

This is a reasonable, balanced approach that supports both consumer dignity and business clarity. As Maryland's economy becomes increasingly digital, we must ensure that older adults are not left behind due to technological barriers. Cashless policies are not innovative when they result in exclusion.

For these reasons, and especially to protect the independence and economic inclusion of older Marylanders, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 191.

If you have any questions, please contact Sara Westrick at [swestrick@aarp.org](mailto:swestrick@aarp.org) or by calling 410-310-0374.

**CASA\_FAV\_HB191.pdf**

Uploaded by: Vidal Glassman

Position: FAV



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB191**  
Consumer Protection - Retail Transactions - Cash Payments  
House Economic Matters Committee  
February 10, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Committee,

**CASA supports House Bill 191.** CASA supports this critical piece of legislation because an increasing number of Maryland retailers refuse cash, effectively locking unbanked and undocumented residents out of everyday necessities like food, fuel, and medicine<sup>1</sup>.

CASA is a national organization building power and improving the quality of life in the working-class: Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities. With a membership of over 173,000 members, CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of members. For nearly forty years, CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our communities closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing vital services to communities across the state and beyond. As part of this work, CASA's community services and engagement provide a clear window into the social and economic life of our members and their communities here in Maryland.

Cash remains the most accessible and reliable form of payment for many Marylanders. When retailers refuse cash, workers paid in cash, such as day laborers and tipped service workers, can be turned away from getting their basic needs met. HB0191 requires most merchants of consumer goods to accept cash for transactions between \$5 and \$300. This is a good thing for consumers in general, and for the working-class immigrant communities that CASA represents in particular, because it ensures that anyone who has the means to purchase everyday goods is able to do so, puts meaningful choice about where their money and data goes into consumers' hands, where those choices belong.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.federalreserve.gov/faqs/currency\\_12772.htm](https://www.federalreserve.gov/faqs/currency_12772.htm)

It is the position of the federal reserve that nothing in federal law prevents alternatives to cash from being used, but that state law could establish such a prohibition.

## **1. Accepting Cash Supports Access to Critical Goods**

The price range in which HB191 would operate includes most everyday goods that working people and families need; groceries, household supplies, clothing, fuel, medicine, etc. We take the position that the important part of such a small transaction is whether the customer has the money to pay for the goods, not whether they have a bank account and a debit card. Requiring cash payment to be available for such purchases ensures that nobody finds themselves at the store in an emergency, with cash, and unable to make a purchase.

Infrastructure system outages and natural disasters can leave businesses unable to use sophisticated payment processing, and by requiring cash payment availability, Maryland protects against some follow-on effects of such events. CASA members have reported being unable to purchase groceries or household necessities despite having cash, simply because a retailer refused it.

## **2. The Most Vulnerable Depend On Cash**

Service industry, day labor, and skilled trade jobs that many working-class immigrants hold are often paid in cash for a number of reasons. Some 5% of Americans are “unbanked”, meaning they do not have any bank accounts or access to financial institutions<sup>2</sup>. Most likely to be unbanked out of all Americans are those who belong to ethnic minorities and who are also very poor<sup>3</sup>.

People are unbanked for a variety of reasons, some of them financial, practical, or because of a lack of access to financial literacy resources. For people with intermittent incomes or very little money, the minimum balance requirements and overdraft fees associated with many accounts are burdensome to the point of making the accounts too risky or cost-prohibitive. Identification requirements and language barriers are another factor that can make opening an account difficult or impossible. The last thing that people in these situations need is for a shop clerk to tell them that the United States Dollar that they are trying to buy food with is no good.

## **3. Vendors and Consumers Should Have the Option to Transact Directly**

Every payment made with a card is subject to a processing fee. These fees vary, but

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<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.clevelandfed.org/publications/economic-commentary/2022/ec-202207-unbanked-in-america-a-review-of-the-literature>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.philadelphiafed.org/-/media/FRBP/Assets/working-papers/2025/wp25-02.pdf>

they are significant: in the neighborhood of 2-3% on Square, one of the most popular POS systems for small businesses. Those fees drain money from local economies, to the benefit of the payment processors and the detriment of local cashflows. Consider a series of payments made with a single \$100 bill, passed from buyer to seller, and so on. After 35 transactions, that \$100 bill is still \$100 (assuming no sales tax for simplicity). If everyone was using a credit card (instead of cash) with a 2% transaction fee, only \$49.30 would be left after 35 transactions<sup>4</sup>. Maryland law should protect consumers' option to avoid participating in those fee arrangements.

Merchants already have the ability to only accept cash payments, a choice for which they bear the burden- they choose not to prioritize convenience, and instead keep that 2% or pass it on to their customers through lower prices.

#### **4. Marylanders' Privacy is at Stake**

Cash payments allow transactions to be made without creating a record held by banks and payment processors. Protecting cash payment gives Maryland consumers the option to keep their daily transactions between themselves and the merchant of their choice. CASA has further concerns about what might be done with those records; once the record is made, it is difficult to control where that information goes. To be clear, the information at stake includes where someone was at a particular time when they purchased something, what they purchased, and how often they go there. Every time a consumer taps or swipes a payment card, or uses a mobile phone to pay, a record of the transaction, including the time, location, and purchase details, is collected by the payment processor (like Square or Clover), vendors, and in some cases mobile phones..

Recently, federal actors such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have tapped every source of information available to them in support of their deportation efforts- efforts that have extremely disruptive and harmful effects on the communities to which CASA's members belong. These efforts have targeted not only people who might be legally subject to deportation, but also those who are not. This concern extends to all Marylanders.

*CASA Policy Team*

*Contact: Cjackson@wearecasa.org*

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<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, consider a couple of friends who trade off babysitting each other's kids. They charge \$100 every time. They would essentially be passing the same \$100 back and forth if they paid each other with cash, but if they paid with a card through a 3rd party payment processor with a 2% fee, after they did it 35 times, they would be passing \$49 back and forth. The point is that every time money changes hands via credit/debit card, a payment processor takes a cut, and that processor does not take a cut of cash payments.

# HB 191.pdf

Uploaded by: William Steinwedel

Position: FAV

**House Bill 191 – Consumer Protection – Retail Transactions – Cash  
Payments  
Hearing on February 10, 2026 – Economic Matters Committee  
Position: FAVORABLE**

*Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on HB 191 in response to a request from Delegate Lorig Charkoudian.*

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of this vital legislation. We are the state’s largest nonprofit law firm, representing thousands of low-income Marylanders every year in civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including family law, housing, public benefits, consumer law, housing, and employment. Because HB 191 prohibits retailers from refusing to accept cash or from charging fees for accepting cash for in-person retail transactions for less than \$300, MLA testifies in strong support of this bill.

At MLA we see that many of our clients use cash for small purchases. Over 80% of those households making less than \$75,000.00 a year in 2024 reported using cash to make purchases in 2024, and the average amount spent to make those cash purchases was \$253<sup>1</sup>. If retailers and merchants are permitted to begin to add fees to process these cash payments, this could add even more additional costs to low-income Marylanders, who are already disproportionately harmed by other fees such as bank overdraft fees<sup>2</sup>.

One example of this is several years ago, MLA represented a client in a Chapter 13 bankruptcy. This client was living on her own making less than \$700 per month. Her home went into foreclosure because her son, who was assisting her, died while serving in the military in Iraq. Despite her economic shortcomings, she was able to make her Trustee payment of less than \$300 for several years<sup>3</sup>. However, all she had was cash, and MLA had to assist this client in going to the bank or to a convenience store every month to convert these cash payments into money orders that she could send to her mortgage company and to the Trustee. If HB 191 did not pass, low-income, elderly citizens such as this woman in the future may have to go through this arduous process for everything that they have to buy. HB 191 would make sure that this would never happen in Maryland.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.atlantafed.org/banking-and-payments/consumer-payments/survey-and-diary-of-consumer-payment-choice/2024-survey-and-diary#Tab2>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nclc.org/congress-move-to-overturn-overdraft-fee-rule-would-block-relief-for-families-living-paycheck-to-paycheck/>

<sup>3</sup> She did not have a mortgage payment because she had a home equity conversion (HECM) mortgage.

Because this bill would protect MLA's clients ability to use cash for small purchases, MLA gives strong support to HB 191. If you need additional information regarding this bill, please contact William Steinwedel at [wsteinwedel@mdlab.org](mailto:wsteinwedel@mdlab.org) and (410) 951-7643.

# **HB 191 - CPD - Support with Amendments.pdf**

Uploaded by: Steve Sakamoto-Wengel

Position: FWA



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*Chief Deputy Attorney General*

**LEONARD J. HOWIE III**  
*Deputy Attorney General*

**CARRIE J. WILLIAMS**  
*Deputy Attorney General*

**SHARON S. MERRIWEATHER**  
*Deputy Attorney General*

**ZENITA WICKHAM HURLEY**  
*Deputy Attorney General*

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*Division Chief*

**STEVEN M. SAKAMOTO-WENGEL**  
*Executive Counsel to the  
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**PETER V. BERNS**  
*General Counsel*

**CHRISTIAN E. BARRERA**  
*Chief Of Staff*

**STATE OF MARYLAND  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION**

**ANTHONY G. BROWN**  
*Attorney General*

February 10, 2026

**TO:** The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama, Chair  
Economic Matters Committee

**FROM:** Steven M. Sakamoto-Wengel  
Executive Counsel to the Attorney General

**RE:** House Bill 191 – Consumer Protection – Retail Transactions – Cash  
Payments  
SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

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The Consumer Protection Division supports House Bill 191, sponsored by Delegate Wims, which would require brick and mortar merchants to accept cash payments for in-person transactions up to \$300. However, the Division recommends an amendment to the bill deleting the minimum \$5 payment requirement, since many of the consumers who do not have access to bank accounts would need to pay cash for small purchases.

Requiring retailers to accept cash payments is a matter of equity. A 2023 survey by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation found that 4.2 percent of U.S. households, representing about 5.6 million households, were unbanked, meaning that nobody in the household had access to a checking or savings account at a bank or credit union.<sup>1</sup> Among the findings were that “between 2011—when the unbanked rate was at its highest level since the survey began in 2009—and 2023, the unbanked rate fell by almost half. Similarly, unbanked rates among Black, Hispanic, and American Indian or Alaska Native households fell by about half. However, unbanked rates among these households remained several times higher than the unbanked rate among White households”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2023 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households, viewed at <https://www.fdic.gov/household-survey>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

The survey further found that “As in previous years, among all unbanked households, “Don’t have enough money to meet minimum balance requirements” was the most cited main reason[.]<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, while the Division understands retailers’ security concerns, we believe that those concerns are outweighed by the ability of unbanked consumers to be able to make purchases, especially given the limits on the amounts of cash transactions. For the reasons set forth, the Division requests that the Economic Matters Committee give House Bill 191 a favorable report with the amendment discussed.

cc: The Honorable Greg Wims  
Members, Economic Matters Committee

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

**HB191\_MHLA\_UNF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Amy Rohrer

Position: UNF

**HB 191 - Consumer Protection – Retail Transactions – Cash Payments**

Economic Matters Committee

February 10, 2026

**Position: OPPOSED**

*MHLA is the sole statewide organization dedicated to advocacy on behalf of Maryland's lodging industry. Our industry is a powerful economic engine - **765 hotels** support more than **115,000 jobs** statewide, generate **\$7.2 billion in wages and salaries**, contribute **\$2.4 billion in state and local tax revenue**, and drive **\$10.6 billion in guest spending** that strengthens communities across Maryland.*

HB 191 would require merchants to accept cash for in-person retail transactions between \$5 and \$300. While well-intentioned, this mandate is **highly problematic for the lodging industry** due to the long-standing and essential practice of requiring a credit card to secure a guest's stay.

Hotels routinely require a **security deposit** to cover incidentals, potential damages, theft, or violations such as smoking in non-smoking rooms. This deposit is not a payment, but a pre-authorization "hold" placed on a credit card to ensure funds are available if charges are incurred. This system protects both the guest and the hotel by avoiding immediate charges while ensuring accountability at checkout.

**Cash deposits are not a viable substitute.** They create significant operational, security, and administrative challenges, including the need for secure storage, increased risk of theft and fraud, and additional handling and reconciliation requirements. Credit card authorizations are safer, more efficient, and are the industry standard nationwide.

More broadly, **decisions about cash-free policies should remain with individual business owners**, who are best positioned to assess their operational needs and security risks. Many businesses adopt cash-free policies to reduce theft, protect employees, and streamline operations. In the hospitality industry, for example, many hotels accept cash at check-out, and those that operate on a cashless basis often accommodate cash-preferring customers by providing on-site access to reverse ATMs or cash-to-card kiosks.

If HB 191 advances, MHLA urges the Committee to **include a clear exclusion for security deposits**, which serve a distinct purpose from ordinary consumer transactions. We draw the Committee's attention to existing statutory language in Philadelphia, where § 9-1132(2)(e) expressly excludes "transactions for the rental of...accommodations for which posting of collateral or security is typically required" from its cash-acceptance mandate. Adopting similar language would preserve the bill's intent while avoiding serious unintended consequences for lodging providers.

Additionally, if this bill advances, MHLA requests consideration of an **exemption for businesses that have elected to operate on a cashless basis but provide a reverse ATM or cash-to-card kiosk** as a reasonable accommodation for customers who wish to pay with cash.

The Maryland Hotel Lodging Association opposes **HB 191** as drafted and respectfully requests an **unfavorable report**.

**For more information, please contact:**

Amy Rohrer, President & CEO

Maryland Hotel Lodging Association

amy@MDLodging.org

# **HB0191- MTC Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Matt Libber

Position: UNF



February 6, 2026

Maryland House Kriselda Valderrama, Chair  
Economic Matters Committee  
230 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB0191 - Climate Solutions Affordability Act of 2026

Chairman Valderrama and Members of the Committee,

My name is Matt Libber, and I am the Legislative Committee Chair for the Maryland Tourism Coalition (MTC). I respectfully submit this testimony **in opposition to House Bill 191**, which would prohibit merchants from refusing cash payments for most in-person retail transactions and classify violations as unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practices under the Maryland Consumer Protection Act.

While this bill is well-intended in seeking to protect consumer payment choice, HB 191 exposes **Maryland businesses—especially small and mid-sized establishments—to significant new risks, including fraud, theft, operational inefficiencies, and hiring challenges.**

#### **HB 191 Increases Exposure to Fraud**

HB 191 mandates that merchants accept cash for in-person transactions between \$5 and \$300, removing their ability to mitigate risks by using more secure and traceable electronic payment methods.

For many sectors—such as hospitality, tourism, retail, and service industries—mandatory acceptance of cash significantly increases::

- **Counterfeit currency**, which remains a persistent threat to retailers.
- **“Quick change” scams**, where employees can be manipulated during manual cash exchanges.
- The loss-prevention benefits businesses currently depend on through digital payments.
- Decreased ability to use secure, trackable electronic payments that reduce fraud exposure.

Mandating cash acceptance elevates fraud risk and undermines modern, effective anti-fraud practices.

#### **Mandatory Cash Acceptance Heightens Theft and Security Risks**

By forcing businesses to accept and store cash, HB 191 naturally increases the amount of physical currency on-site, leading to:

- Greater risk of **robbery** or physical theft.
- Increased exposure to **internal theft**, especially in high-turnover industries.
- Additional costs for **security systems, armored transport, and staff training.**



These negative impacts arise solely from the loss of the business's ability to choose safer, cash-free operational models.

### **The Bill Reduces Efficiency and Drives Up Operating Costs**

Many Maryland employers have transitioned to digital payments to streamline workflow. HB 191 reverses this progress by requiring:

- Time-consuming **cash counting**, reconciliation, and deposit procedures.
- Procurement and maintenance of **cash-handling equipment**.
- Increased exposure to **human error**, including miscounted change and reconciliation discrepancies.

Modernized businesses depend on cash-free processes for efficiency, customer throughput, and cost containment. Many Maryland businesses have moved away from cash precisely because digital payments increase efficiency, reduce costs, and decrease staff time spent on non-revenue tasks. HB 191 reverses these innovations by mandating outdated and costly processes

### **HB 191 Will Make Hiring and Retention More Difficult**

Many front-line workers prefer not to handle cash due to concerns over:

- **Personal safety risks**, especially during opening/closing shifts.
- Stress associated with potential theft incidents or cash-drawer shortages.
- The administrative burdens inherent to cash-based environments.

For industries already struggling to recruit employees—including tourism, hospitality, and retail—HB 191 compounds hiring difficulties by requiring workplaces to reintroduce unwanted risks and responsibilities.

### **5. HB 191 Interferes with Effective, Modern Business Models**

The bill restricts innovative approaches that many sectors, especially tourism venues, stadiums, and hospitality—have implemented to:

- Improve guest flow and reduce wait times,
- Minimize physical cash exposure, and
- Enhance customer safety and experience.

HB 191 forces these operations to reinstate cash acceptance, even where cashless systems are essential to safe and efficient high-volume transaction environments.

### **Conclusion**

While consumer payment flexibility is an important consideration, **HB 191 fails to balance consumer choice with business safety, efficiency, and sustainability**. Consumers have numerous avenues to secure payment cards today, beyond credit cards, to include gift cards and debit cards which link directly to their bank accounts where cash can be deposited.



**MARYLAND  
TOURISM  
COALITION**

By forcing cash acceptance, the bill:

- Increases fraud and counterfeit risk
- Heightens theft and safety concerns
- Creates operational inefficiencies
- Complicates employee hiring and retention
- Disrupts modern business models that benefit both customers and workers

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the **House Economic Matters Committee** to issue an **unfavorable report on House Bill 191**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Libber  
Legislative Chair  
Maryland Tourism Coalition

# **HB191\_RestaurantAssoc\_Thompson\_UNF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Melvin Thompson

Position: UNF



## **House Bill 191**

*Consumer Protection - Retail Transactions - Cash Payments*

February 10, 2026

### **Position: Unfavorable**

Madame Chair and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

The Restaurant Association of Maryland opposes House Bill 191.

For multiple reasons, acceptable payment methods for goods and services should be solely the decision of business owners. This is not a matter that government should be regulating.

Some business owners in our industry have decided to establish cashless payment policies to avoid becoming a target for robbery or theft, which is of particular concern to businesses that have later operating hours. Other business owners have adopted a cashless payment policy because it helps to ensure faster transactions, which is important for quick-service operations. And some business owners tell us they have switched to a cashless payment policy to avoid potential issues with staff giving customers incorrect change and cash drawer shortages.

Business owners should remain free to make their own decisions regarding payment methods based on their operating needs and any security considerations. For these and other reasons, we oppose HB 191 and request an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melvin R. Thompson" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Melvin R. Thompson  
Senior Vice President  
Government Affairs and Public Policy