

# **HB994 Testimony - Boaf0.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Delegate Adrian Boaf0

Position: FAV

**ADRIAN BOAFO**  
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ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER

Economic Matters Committee

*Chair*  
Workers' Compensation  
Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates  
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**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Chairwoman Kris Valderrama  
Economic Matters Committee  
House Office Building, Room 230  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Valderrama, Vice-Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

HB994 strengthens consumer protections for Marylanders by establishing clear registration and financial security requirements for sellers of travel services operating in our State. It ensures travel providers meet baseline accountability standards before collecting money from consumers, and it gives the Maryland Department of Labor the tools needed to oversee and enforce these protections.

I am bringing this bill back to honor the Wurie family and the Marylanders we lost in Summer 2024 while traveling for the religious pilgrimage of Hajj. This tragedy should never have happened, and it was caused by travel organizers who failed to provide the promised documentation and basic support travelers needed. Their loss exposed a serious gap in oversight and makes clear that Maryland must act now to ensure this never happens again.

HB994 addresses this gap by requiring sellers of travel and independent agents to file annually with the Department of Labor, pay a \$300 filing fee, and prohibiting them from accepting payment unless they are properly registered. The bill also requires proof of at least \$1,000,000 in professional liability and errors and omissions insurance, and requires sellers of travel to submit a list of affiliated independent agents each year to strengthen transparency and oversight. Finally, it establishes the Sellers of Travel Services Registration Fund to support administration and enforcement, and directs the Department to provide public notice, enforce compliance, and adopt regulations to carry out the law.

HB994 is a common sense measure that strengthens consumer protections, increases accountability in the travel industry, and helps ensure Marylanders are not put at risk by irresponsible or bad actors. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 994.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian B.' with a stylized flourish.

Delegate Adrian A. Boafo

**HB0994\_Testimony\_Jonathan\_G\_Harris\_unf.pdf**

Uploaded by: Jonathan Harris

Position: UNF

## 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  
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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

**HB994\_ASTA\_030926.pdf**

Uploaded by: Laura Vogel

Position: UNF



March 9, 2026

The Hon. Kriselda Valderrama  
Chair, House Economic Matters Committee  
230 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairwoman Valderrama:

On behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the more than 4,900 travel advisors in the state of Maryland, I am writing to express our concerns with House Bill (HB) 994, which would impose new regulatory burdens on travel advisors in Maryland and across the country. I respectfully request that this letter be made part of the record of the committee's March 11, 2026, hearing on the legislation.

ASTA is the world's leading professional travel trade organization, representing more than 310,000 travel advisors across the country. Travel agencies – online, “brick and mortar” and many hybrid business models in between – play a critical role in the broader travel and tourism economy. Ninety-five percent of travel agencies are small businesses and 80% of them are women-owned. Our membership ranges from home-based businesses and traditional storefront agencies to the largest travel management companies and online travel agencies.

Before diving into the specifics of the legislation, allow me to express my condolences to the Wurie family as they continue to feel the tremendous pain of losing their beloved Isatu and Alieu. This loss, occurring while on such a holy pilgrimage, is a tragedy no family should face. We truly wish their loved ones peace and comfort, and we were disheartened to learn that the negligence of a tour operator may have contributed to this tragedy.

As the world's largest association of travel professionals, we share the committee's commitment to protecting consumers from travel scams and unethical conduct. ASTA members adhere to a comprehensive Code of Ethics, and we encourage travelers to report suspected fraud or misconduct to our Consumer Affairs department. Through certifications like our Verified Travel Advisor program, members pursue ongoing ethics and business training. Because one bad actor can damage the entire profession, ASTA is committed to ensuring consumers choose a travel advisor they can trust.

HB 994 would create a seller of travel registration program and impose other new requirements on travel agencies in the state and across the country. Under the proposed legislation, starting on October 1, 2026, any travel agency that resides in Maryland or solicits business from a Maryland resident must register with the state at a cost of \$300 per year and provide a list of agents or

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[ASTA.org](https://www.asta.org)



employees affiliated with the agency. They must also provide proof of professional liability and errors and omissions insurance in the amount of at least \$1 million.

While we endorse efforts to weed out unscrupulous individuals masquerading as *bona fide* travel agents, we question the justification for additional regulation. We are concerned about the regulatory burden and cost associated with adding another state registration requirement to the list of those that already exist today, as it would be especially burdensome on small agencies that do business in multiple states. Moreover, because travel advisors are not constrained by state lines, this regulation would undoubtedly be confusing, if not unintentionally overlooked, by travel professionals who only occasionally sell to Maryland residents but live outside the state.

As previously mentioned, all ASTA members are subject to a strict code of ethics. We strongly encourage consumers to do their homework to find the right travel professional, and we provide the ability for consumers to connect with our Verified Travel Advisors without worrying about being the subject of an unfortunate scam.

We appreciate that this legislation is well-intended and stand ready to protect anyone affected by the actions of incompetent or unscrupulous travel agencies and tour operators. However, we are concerned the proposed legislation does not strike the right balance between protecting consumers and minimizing regulatory burdens on professional, ethical travel advisors and agencies in Maryland and across the country. ASTA and its members would welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to craft a bill that is fair to both consumers and travel advisors, but we respectfully request that you delay consideration of HB 994 – or similar legislation – until the appropriate balance can be struck.

Thank you for considering our views on this critical issue. If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Laura Vogel, Director of Advocacy, at [lvogel@asta.org](mailto:lvogel@asta.org) or 703-739-8701. Further, should you be interested in speaking directly with travel advisors in Maryland, we would be happy to connect you.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zane Kerby", is written over a light blue circular background element.

Zane Kerby  
President and Chief Executive Officer

CC: The Hon. Adrian Boafo  
The Hon. Marvin Holmes  
The Hon. Kym Taylor

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