

HB0994_Testimony_Jonathan_G_Harris_senate_fwa.pdf

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Position: FWA

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Senate Finance Committee
Maryland General Assembly

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

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Submitted by: Jonathan G. Harris, A Maryland Consumer of Travel Services
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I submit this testimony urging the Don’t You Worry (Wurie) Act be approved only after exempting those with only a small Maryland business volume or hobbyist accepting compensation to offset their expenses and effort as detailed in Section V of this testimony.

As a Maryland resident and active consumer of travel services, I have serious concerns that this legislation as written 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.

Even a situation where an organizer of a bird photography tour group asks for \$10 from each participant to help cover her automobile expenses would make her a seller of travel and subject to this law.

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. Proposed Safe Harbor

This bill should only be passed after amending to include these exclusions from the registration and insurance requirements.

1. **Volunteers/Hobbyists:** Those with annual net compensation from travel services below \$20,000.
2. **Small/Niche Operators:** Those with annual gross revenue from Maryland residents

below \$100,000.

Conclusion

While what the Wurie's have suffered is heart breaking, a bill that criminalizes many ordinary activities and decreases opportunities for Maryland residents is not a cure. Even if the intent is only to enforce the bill against rogue operators, the broad nature of the bill creates uncertainty and opportunities for abuse by people with vendettas.

For the reasons above, I respectfully urge the Committee to amend the Don't You Worry (Wurie) Act. Without this amendment, 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,

Respectfully submitted,
Jonathan Harris

A Maryland Consumer of Travel Services.

HB994_MHLA_UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Amy Rohrer

Position: UNF

**HB 994 - Business Regulation - Travel Services - Special Fund, Fees, and Surety Requirement
(Don't You Worry (Wurie) Act)**
Senate Finance3 Committee
April 1, 2026
Position: OPPOSE (unless amended)

*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.*

On behalf of the Maryland Hotel Lodging Association (MHLA), we respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HB 994.

HB 994 imposes new requirements on Maryland hotels that receive compensation in exchange for arranging or providing transportation for registered guests.

As amended by the House, however, the bill does not apply comparably to short-term rental (STR) hosts or platforms - despite their significant and growing share of Maryland's lodging marketplace. This creates an uneven regulatory framework for providers operating in the same space.

Where hotels and short-term rentals operate in the same marketplace, they should be treated consistently under the law. To ensure that consistency, we respectfully request that the Committee strike lines 4–10 on page 4, thereby extending the same exemption to hotels as currently afforded to STRs.

If the bill is amended to provide equal treatment across the lodging industry, MHLA would be pleased to withdraw its opposition.

Thank you for your consideration, and we stand ready to work with the Committee to achieve a fair and consistent policy outcome.

For more information, please contact:

Amy Rohrer, President & CEO
Maryland Hotel Lodging Association
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HB994_ASTA_040126_UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Laura Vogel

Position: UNF



March 30, 2026

The Hon. Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Hon. Antonio Hayes
Vice Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairwoman Beidle and Vice Chair Hayes:

On behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the nearly 5,000 travel advisors in the state of Maryland, I am writing to express 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 April 1, 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 independent 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 possible 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 operates in Maryland or solicits business from a Maryland resident must register with the state at a cost of \$300 per year (and set to increase every year) and provide a list of agents or 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.

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



While we endorse efforts to weed out unscrupulous individuals masquerading as *bona fide* travel agents, we fail to see the justification for additional regulation. Specifically, 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, and 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.

Further, as reported in the fiscal note for this legislation, the expected funds collected from the registration fee would not be allocated toward an enforcement mechanism or restitution fund for travelers who may have a legitimate complaint. They simply cover the cost to administer this registration program. This is nothing more than an added bureaucratic burden that delivers no meaningful benefit to the state of Maryland, travel advisors, or the traveling public.

As previously noted, all ASTA members are subject to a strict code of ethics. We strongly encourage consumers to do their homework to find a proven 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 help the state of Maryland protect anyone affected by the actions of incompetent or unscrupulous 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 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 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,

Zane Kerby
President and Chief Executive Officer

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