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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 20, 2026

The Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 140 – Criminal Law – Benefits Exploitation

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 170 from last year. As I did last year, this is also a cross-file of Delegate Kaufman's House Bill 216.

This bill would create a new crime involving the exploitation of someone's government benefits. The crime would have three elements. First, a person would need to be found guilty of using deception, coercion, exploitation, isolation of any means. These terms are all defined in the bill. Second, through such means, the person charged with the crime would have to be found guilty of knowingly recruiting, harboring, transporting, or obtaining an individual as victim. Thirdly, that conduct would need to be found to have been perpetrated for the purpose of appropriating the government benefits of the victim for personal benefit of the defendant or to benefit another. In other words, this crime would be similar to human trafficking but could instead be referred to as "benefits trafficking" or "benefits exploitation".

In the context of this bill, benefits exploitation could best be described as the systematic recruitment, harboring, and financial exploitation of elder and disabled adults and adults suffering from dementia who receive government benefits such as Social Security, Veteran's Benefits, Medicaid, Medicare, pension benefits, disability benefits or other government benefits.

Such exploitation occurs with alarming frequency. The exploiters tend to pose as sincere individuals offering to provide care for at-risk adults in an in-home setting. Once recruited, the at-risk adults sign over their government benefits to their caregiver. From that point on, the victims are held against their will while their caregiver receives their benefits and uses them for the benefit of the caregiver, not for the benefit of the victims. In extreme cases, the victims are moved from location to location, and denied basic needs such as food, clothing, and adequate shelter.

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Victims of Benefits Exploitation are often forgotten at-risk adults who have fallen through the cracks of various mental health systems, are unhoused, and no longer have a social support system in place.

Benefits exploitation is deceptive and predatory behavior, causing extreme detrimental harm to individuals and families. Among the organizations supporting this bill are the Alzheimer's Association, the Associated, the Maryland Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the Maryland Department of Aging, the Maryland Department of Human Services, and Mayor Brandon Scott.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 140 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.