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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Support of HB304 - Consumer Protection - Unfair, Abusive, or Deceptive Trade Practices - Exploitation of Vulnerable Adults

Chair Kelly, Vice Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Finance committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of HB304. This bill was jointly referred to the House Economic Matters and House Judiciary Committee, passing both unanimously, and received a unanimous vote on the House floor.

This bill will simplify the process by which our Attorney General's office is able to pursue criminals who financially exploit seniors by making financial exploitation a violation of the Consumer Protection Act. Depending on the level of assets stolen, criminal penalties can still be assessed, but the process by which these cases are pursued would be significantly more streamlined with this legislation. This bill will expedite the recovery of assets and ensure the AG can pursue more of these cases.

In 2016, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation granting the Consumer Protection Division of the AG's office the ability to bring a civil case and pursue damages against individual criminals who financially exploit seniors. While likely under-reported, estimates of elder financial abuse and fraud costs to older Americans range from \$2.9 billion to \$36.5 billion annually. In Maryland more than 54,000 cases of fraud were reported in 2018, according to the Federal Trade Commission, with losses totaling more than \$18 million. Since the AG's office began pursuing these cases, 150 cases have been open, but only 15 have resulted in assets recovered. For many of these cases, having the option to pursue these cases before an Administrative Law Judge will require fewer resources from the AG's office, allowing them to spend more time recovering assets and less time in court.

As incidences of financial scams against seniors increase during our public health crisis, it is especially important that we enact legislation that will assist in protecting and recovering assets from those who need it most.

I urge the committee to report favorably HB304.