



One Park Place | Suite 475 | Annapolis, MD 21401-3475
1-866-542-8163 | Fax: 410-837-0269
aarp.org/md | md@aarp.org | twitter: @aarpmc
facebook.com/aarpmc

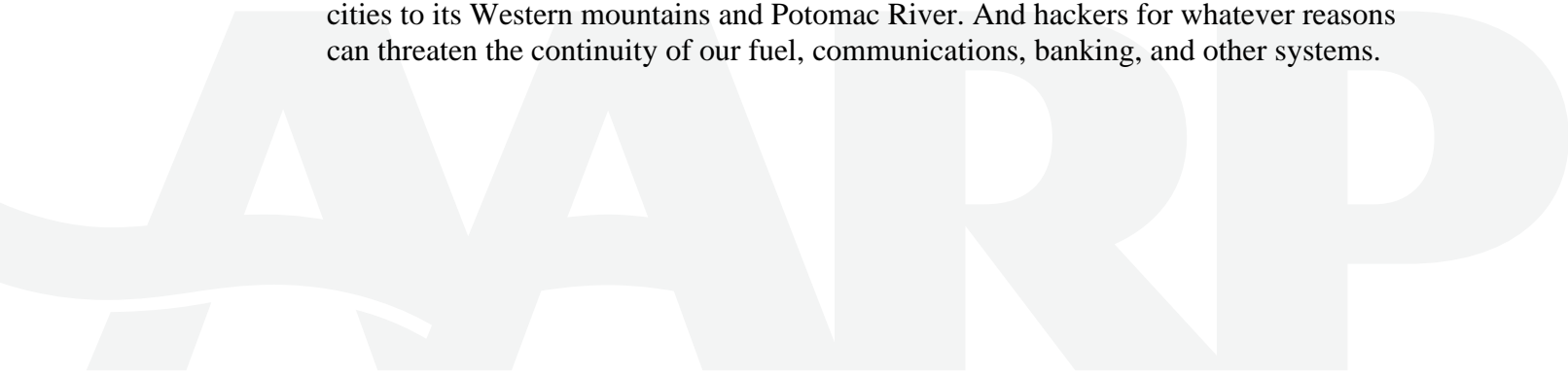
**SB565 Public Safety – Emergency Management – Price Gouging
Consumer Protections
Senate Finance Committee
FAVORABLE
February 24, 2022**

Good afternoon Chair Kelley and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Karen Kalla, member of the AARP Maryland Executive Council and resident of Anne Arundel County. AARP Maryland is one of the largest membership-based organizations in Maryland, encompassing more than 850,000 members. Key priorities of our organization include protecting consumers, elder abuse, and exploitation. AARP Maryland is proud to support SB565. We thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. We also thank Senators Lam and Biedle for sponsoring this important piece of legislation.

AARP is a non-partisan, non-profit nationwide organization that strengthens communities and advocates on those issues that most matter to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

We are pleased to support Senate Bill 565 that would prohibit a person during and in the ninety days following the end of a State of Emergency, from selling or offering to sell essential goods and services for a price of 10% or more than what they cost between 60 and 4 days prior to that State of Emergency. Senate Bill 565 identifies how to claim exceptions to this rule; the kinds of goods and services covered; and provides a process both to notify the person who may be in violation of this bill and to bring action by an individual who suffered injury or loss due to a violation.

A State of Emergency is an urgent call to action, a social responsibility to work together in unique ways and help the affected community address the complications of the day. The COVID pandemic has challenged the world in ways that have impacted most aspects of Maryland life. Maryland has in the past and continues to be vulnerable to a full range of decidedly problematic weather conditions; from the east Atlantic coastline, to the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, through its metropolitan cities to its Western mountains and Potomac River. And hackers for whatever reasons can threaten the continuity of our fuel, communications, banking, and other systems.



Unfortunately, some sellers are taking advantage of the confusion, uncertainty, and increased demands associated with States of Emergency. They are increasing the cost of essential goods and services when and where they are most critically needed; often for those who can least afford to pay. Examples include: the increase in the cost of food, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and toilet paper in the early stages of COVID; wide swings in the cost for a COVID Home Test Kit later; and the higher price of fuel in the wake of the Colonial pipeline hacking.

Preparing for emergencies must include consumer protections against those who would exploit a catastrophic event for their own gain. Ensuring consumer protections is essential in our economy which relies on consumer spending—spending largely driven by older adults. This spending must take place in a healthy and honest marketplace. In such a fair and vibrant marketplace, older adults have the power to make informed choices about the options that best serve their needs at an affordable price. They should also have the knowledge that if a company or individual violates their trust or attempts to unfairly dominate the market, there will be pathways to effective redress for them and their communities.

Senate Bill 565 will protect consumers against unfair, deceptive, or abusive practices. It includes an option for individuals to be notified about the State of Emergency and informed about state provisions against price gouging.

For these reasons AARP Maryland supports SB565 Public Safety – Emergency Management – Price Gouging Consumer Protections and respectfully requests the Senate Finance Committee to issue a favorable report. For questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan, Director of Advocacy for AARP Maryland at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.