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SB 660 Office of the Comptroller – Taxpayer Advocate Division
Senate Budget and Taxation
FAVORABLE
March 9, 2023

Good afternoon Chair Guzzone and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy for AARP MD. On behalf of our almost 900,000 members, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of **SB 661 Office of the Comptroller – Taxpayer Advocate Division**. We thank the Comptroller for bringing SB 660 to the General Assembly.

SB 660 establishes an Office of the State Taxpayer Advocate within the Comptroller's Office and provides at least six staff members to assist Marylanders with timely resolutions to tax issues.

As indicated by the Comptroller's her office may be the agency that interacts more frequently with a greater share of the general public than most other agencies. It is also the agency charged with tax collection, which can be intimidating and confusing for many Marylanders. In alignment with best practices from the federal government and other states, establishing an Office of the State Taxpayer Advocate with adequate staff will provide an improved customer service experience for Marylanders while helping to bring cases to resolution in an expedited way.

For some background and why AARP supports this bill beginning February 1 and continuing through April 15, AARP Foundation is providing in-person tax assistance and preparation through its Tax-Aide program — and it's completely free.

Last year, 774 AARP Foundation Tax-Aide volunteers helped more than 40,210 Maryland residents claim \$27,520,582 in federal refunds and \$2,751,085 at 127 sites in Maryland, including senior centers, libraries and other convenient locations.

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide is the nation's largest volunteer-run free tax preparation service. Volunteers are trained and IRS-certified every year to ensure they understand the latest changes to the U.S. Tax Code.

Taxpayers who used AARP Foundation Tax-Aide in 2019 received \$1.6 billion in income tax refunds and more than \$200 million in Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs). They also avoided any tax preparation fees and pitches for high-interest tax credit or refund loans. The program is offered in conjunction with the IRS, and AARP membership is not required.

AARP believes that states should increase support for taxpayer assistance programs such as Tax Counseling for the elderly and or taxpayer advocate programs that this bill requires. An advocate located within the Comptroller's office could help Marylanders with income tax assistance and other tax related questions and concerns.

We respectfully request a favorable report for SB 660. If you have questions or need further clarification, please contact me at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.