


F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Commissioner	Health Department	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201	AGENCY REPORT	
	Subject/Position:	22-0086R – Investigative Hearing - Human Trafficking Investigations and Prosecutions Favorable		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

February 1, 2023

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill #22-0086R, “Investigative Hearing - Human Trafficking Investigations and Prosecutions.” This resolution invites representatives from City agencies and collaborators from the Baltimore Human Trafficking Collaborative to brief the City Council on the scope of the human trafficking problem in Baltimore City, current efforts to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of human trafficking, further strategies that could be implemented to bring these individuals to justice, and resources that are needed to assist survivors of human trafficking.

The Baltimore City Long Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) Program is administered by the federal government and is housed within BCHD’s Division of Aging and CARE Services. The Baltimore City’s LTCO advocates and promotes resident rights for residents of the 28 Baltimore City nursing homes and over 500 licensed assisted living facilities (ALFs). The LTCO is also responsible for addressing complaints made by or for residents of these long-term care facilities. In its role, the LTCO becomes aware of incidents where these residents are being exploited and abused.

Specifically, the LTCO has witnessed vulnerable residents being trafficked for their Social Security benefits. Hospitals and nursing homes often discharge older and disabled residents to assisted livings with the assistance of placement agencies or through on-going relationships with assisted livings facilities. Too often, the LTCO discovers that the resident never arrived at the designated ALF or is soon relocated to an unlicensed ALF without the resident’s consent. The ALF provider quickly assigns themselves as representative payee of the resident’s Social Security income, often as a condition of admission. When moved, the ALF owner, without input from the resident, will negotiate payment with the receiving ALF provider. At that point, the resident does not have access to their income and loses their ability to control or determine where or how they live. Family and friends lose contact with the resident as the initial ALF provider may not share any information about the resident. The resident is then lost to those who can assist them and is wholly dependent on someone who views the resident as a product, not a person.

The LTCO, City Police, Fire Department, Adult Protective Services, and other agencies are contacted to respond to complaints concerning these unlicensed facilities. Complaints include residents being abused, neglected and denied means to leave these deplorable environments. The

state regulatory agency maintains they do not have authority to monitor or respond to care- or abuse-related complaints since these facilities are not licensed.

We recommend that the City develop an interagency response to these complaints and to protect these vulnerable adults, as the number of licensed and unlicensed ALFs continues to grow. We also note that while this is a City problem, many of these residents are from other jurisdictions. These residents end up in ALFs in Baltimore City, because they cannot afford an assisted living facility in their communities.

For the reasons noted above, BCHD urges a **favorable** report on Council Bill #22-0086R.