

**192 Labor, Civil Rights, Consumer, Legal Services
and Community Groups and Academics**

April 16, 2024

Rep. Bryan Steil
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC, 20515

Re: HR 7428 (Steil), Earned Wage Access Consumer Protection Act – OPPOSE

Dear Rep. Steil,

The 193 undersigned labor, civil rights, consumer, legal services and community groups and academics write to express our opposition to HR 7428 (Steil), the Earned Wage Access Consumer Protection Act. In the guise of offering protections, the bill obscures its true effect: **to exempt fintech cash advances from the Truth in Lending Act, to endorse a form of loan that makes workers pay to be paid, and to facilitate new evasions by payday lenders.** It is especially inappropriate to authorize a new class of fintech cash advances with costs imposed on low-wage workers, disproportionately impacting communities of color and women, when there are a growing number of options to obtain early pay at no cost

Earned wage advances are loans made to workers ahead of payday that are repaid on payday. The amount of the loan is tied to the wages that have been earned but are not due until payday. True earned wage advances are offered through employers, often with fees, but some employers offer early pay for free. Fake direct-to-consumer providers claim to be paying earned wages but have no connection to wages or payroll, are repaid by debiting bank accounts, and collect purportedly voluntary “tips.” Both models charge inflated expedite fees if the worker wants the advance quickly, which nearly everyone does.

California data based on nearly 6 million transactions shows how the costs of these advances add up.¹ Including all of the costs, **the average annual percentage rate (APR) for these advances is over 330%** for both the employer-based companies that charge fees and for the companies that collect “tips.” Tip-based companies collected tips 73% of the time. Just three companies generated \$17.55 million in tip revenue plus another \$6.24 million in other fees, likely expedite fees, in 2021. Workers get very little credit, with a typical advance of \$40 to \$100 for 10 days. The fees add up, as the average worker takes out 36 loans a year, and as many as 100.

HR 7428 would obscure the relative cost of these fintech cash advances. It would exempt these loans from the Truth in Lending Act (TILA) and prevent the ability to compare high-cost earned wage advances to other credit options. It is no surprise that these fintech lenders, like

¹ See National Consumer Law Center, [Data on Earned Wage Advances and Fintech Payday Loan “Tips” Show High Costs for Low-Wage Workers](#) (Apr. 10, 2023); Calif. Dep’t of Fin’l Prot’n & Innov., [2021 Earned Wage Access Data Findings](#) (Analysis completed Q1 2023) (“CA DFPI EWA Data”).

traditional payday lenders, want to avoid disclosing a 330% APR, especially given the way the loans roll over and over. While the costs may vary, especially for the tip-based lenders, the apps through which the advances are made can easily adjust the APR to correspond to the amount of default tip that is inserted, or to any different amount that the consumer selects.

The bill would facilitate evasion by payday lenders. The bill’s definition of “earned wage access service” would extend to any loan that is “based on the consumer’s representations and the provider’s reasonable determination of the consumer’s earned but unpaid income.” That vague definition could easily be exploited by traditional payday lenders.

HR 7428 perpetrates the myth that these fintech cash advances are not credit. The bill would be used to persuade state legislators to enact the model bill by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)² that would exempt these advances from state credit laws, including fee and rate caps. Asserting that these advances are not credit follows the path of traditional payday lenders, which established the payday loan industry by convincing legislators that their loans were not loans and fees were not interest but only a modest fee for deferring cashing of a check.

The bill would undermine or block coming guidance from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and facilitate new evasions by payday lenders. The bill purports to give the CFPB authority to regulate these advances, but the CFPB already has ample authority. Indeed, the CFPB has told the General Accounting Office that it plans to clarify the treatment of earned wage advances under TILA.³ The CFPB’s then-Acting General Counsel Seth Frotman warned two years ago that earned wage advances that charge any kind of fee, voluntary or not, “may well be TILA credit.”⁴ The bill would limit the CFPB’s options in how to ensure that consumers receive clear information and how to prevent evasions of federal lending laws.

The protections in the bill are not meaningful. The bill purports to offer a number of protections that would apply to fintech cash advances. But the bill largely codifies lenders’ current business model without adding significant new protections. Companies do not need to file civil suit, use third-party debt collectors or sell to debt buyers when they are able to collect 97% of the time through their stranglehold over the consumer’s paycheck or bank account.⁵ The

² See ALEC, [Earned Wage Access Act](#).

³ In a February 13, 2023 letter to the GAO, CFPB Director Rohit Chopra stated that he agreed with the recommendation that the CFPB issue clarification on the application of the TILA definition of “credit” for earned wage access products other than the free ones covered by the CFPB’s November 2020 advisory opinion. See Appendix III to U.S. GAO, [Financial Technology: Products Have Benefits and Risks to Underserved Consumers, and Regulatory Clarity Is Needed](#) (March 2023). Director Chopra said in a July 17 interview that he hopes to have a revised advisory opinion completed in 2024. See Evan Weinberg, Yun Park, Bloomberg Law, [States Set Collision Course Over Pay-on-Demand for Earned Wages](#) (Aug. 10, 2023).

⁴ [Letter from Seth Frotman to Beverly Brown Ruggia](#) et al. (Jan. 18, 2022).

⁵ See Financial Health Network, [“Earned Wage Access and Direct-to-Consumer Advance Usage Trends”](#) at 2 (April 2021) (finding that advances “were recouped successfully at least 97% of the time”); Calif. Dep’t of Fin’l Prot’n & Innov., Initial Statement of Reasons For The Proposed Adoption Of Regulations Under The California Consumer Financial Protection Law And The California Financing Law, California

bill requires compliance with the Electronic Fund Transfer Act, but the EFTA's ban on compulsory repayment of credit by preauthorized electronic fund transfer would not apply if the advances are not deemed to be credit. The bill limits certain repercussions of not tipping enough but does not stop all of the "multiple strategies that lenders use to make tips almost as certain as required fees."⁶

The costs of fintech cash advances fall primarily on low-wage workers who need a living wage, not a product that just makes them pay to be paid. Balloon-payment loans should not be exempted from credit laws, however they are styled, as they merely lead to a cycle of reborrowing where each advance repays the previous one without providing new liquidity.

For these reasons, we oppose the HR 7428 regarding earned wage access services.

Yours very truly,

National

20/20 Vision

ACLU

AFL-CIO

American Economic Liberties Project

American Federation of Teachers

American Friends Service Committee

Americans for Financial Reform

Appleseed Foundation

Center for Responsible Lending

Center for WorkLife Law

Coalition of Labor Union Women

Coalition on Human Needs

Consumer Action

Consumer Federation of America

Consumer Reports

Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

Equal Rights Advocates

Impact Fund

Japanese American Citizens League (JAACL)

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

MomsRising

NAACP

Deferred Deposit Transaction Law, And California Student Loan Servicing Act Pro 01-21 at 24-25 (March 17, 2023) ("These successful collection rates significantly exceed the rates of the DFPI's CFL and CDDTL licensees, who offer credit under those laws. Furthermore, such income-based advance models would be unsustainable if the majority of consumers did not repay providers, and providers employ language in advertising and consumer communications that reflects this reality. In light of these considerations, to consider earned wage access companies to be offering a product that is not credit would elevate form over substance.").

⁶ CA DFPI EWA Data at 61.

National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders
National Association of Consumer Advocates
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD)
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Community Action Partnership
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)
National Consumers League
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Institute for Workers' Rights
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Prosperity Now
Public Citizen
Public Counsel
Public Good Law Center
Public Justice
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice
U.S. PIRG
UnidosUS
Workplace Fairness
Young Invincibles

Alaska

AKPIRG

Arizona

Center for Economic Integrity
Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Tucson Diocesan Council
UFCW Local 99
William E. Morris Institute for Justice

California

California Low-Income Consumer Coalition (CLICC)
CAMEO- California Association for Micro Enterprise Opportunity
Consumer Federation of California
Legal Assistance for Seniors

Lift to Rise
Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy
Mission Asset Fund
Office of Kat Taylor
Prof. Alysson Snow, University of San Diego School of Law, Housing Rights Legal Clinic*
Prof. Scott Maurer, Katharine & George Alexander Community Law Center*
Prof. Steven M. Graves, California State University, Northridge*
Public Law Center
Rise Economy (formerly California Reinvestment Coalition)

Colorado

Bell Policy Center
CoPIRG
The One Less Foundation
Towards Justice

Connecticut

Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.
Prof. Annie Harper, Yale School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry*

Delaware

Delaware Community Reinvestment Action Council, Inc.

District of Columbia

DC Consumer Rights Coalition
Prof. Emeritus Arthur E. Wilmarth, Jr., George Washington University Law School*
Tzedek DC

Florida

Florida Consumer Action Network
Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, Inc.

Georgia

Georgia Watch
Neighborhood Improvement Association
Prof. Emeritus Mark Budnitz, Georgia State University College of Law*
Sur Legal Collaborative

Illinois

Prof. Lea Krivinskas Shepard, Loyola University Chicago School of Law*
Prof. Thomas L. Eovaldi, Northwestern Pritzger School of Law*
Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Indiana

Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute
Prosperity Indiana

Kentucky

Kentucky Equal Justice Center

Louisiana

New Hope Collaborative

Maine

Maine People's Alliance
Maine Small Business Coalition

Maryland

1199SEIU MD/DC
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Economic Action Maryland
Prof. Jeff Sovern, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law*
Prof. Jodi Frey, University of Maryland, School of Social Work*
Public Justice Center

Massachusetts

Lawrence CommunityWorks, Inc.
Neighborhood Developers, The
Sciencecorps

Minnesota

Minnesotans for Fair Lending
Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
Prof. Prentiss Cox, University of Minnesota Law School*

Nebraska

Nebraska Appleseed

Nevada

Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada
Nevada Coalition of Legal Service Providers
Nevada Legal Services, Inc.
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
UNITE HERE Culinary Workers Union, Local 226

New Jersey

BlueWaveNJ

Communities First initiative
CWA Local 1081
Legal Services of New Jersey
New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center
New Jersey Citizen Action
NJ Time to Care Coalition

New Mexico

KWH Law Center for Social Justice and Change
Prof. Nathalie Martin, University of New Mexico School of Law*

New York

Center for Elder Law & Justice
Cypress Hills Local Development Corp.
Empire Justice Center
Eno Awotoye, Retail Action Project
Genesee Co-op Federal Credit Union
Long Island Housing Services, Inc.
Lower East Side People's FCU
Mobilization for Justice
New Economy Project
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)
New York StateWide Senior Action Council
New Yorkers for Responsible Lending
Prof. Dora Galacatos, Fordham Law School Feerick Center for Social Justice*
Prof. Edward J. Janger, Brooklyn Law School*
Prof. Marianne Artusio, Touro Law Center*
Prof. Norman I. Silber, Maurice A. Deane School of Law, Hofstra University*
Prof. Susan Block-Lieb, Fordham Law School*
Rural Law Center of New York
Strycker's Bay Neighborhood Council
Western New York Law Center

North Carolina

Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy
The Collaborative
NC Coalition for Responsible Lending
North Carolina Council of Churches
North Carolina Justice Center
Pisgah Legal Services
Rebuilding Broken Places CDC

Ohio

Advocates for Basic Legal Equality

Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center
Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC
Prof. Cathy Lesser Mansfield, Case Western Reserve University School of Law*

Oklahoma

Voices Organized in Civic Engagement (VOICE)

Oregon

Oregon Consumer Justice

Pennsylvania

Community Legal Services of Philadelphia
Justice at Work Pennsylvania

Rhode Island

Economic Progress Institute

South Carolina

Columbia Consumer Education Council Inc
South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center
South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development

Texas

Brazos Valley Affordable Housing Corporation
BV Financial Fitness Center
cdc | come dream. come build.
Center for Transforming Lives
COPS/Metro Alliance
Dallas Area Interfaith
Equal Justice Center
Houston Area Urban League, The
Prof. Neil L. Sobol, Texas A&M University School of Law*
RAISE Texas
Texas Appleseed
The Metropolitan Organization (TMO)
United Way of Central Texas
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas
United Way of Tarrant County
United Ways of Texas
Valley Interfaith
Zan Wesley Holmes, Jr Community Outreach Center

Utah

Prof. Christopher L. Peterson, University of Utah, S.J. Quinney College of Law*
Prof. Jacob S. Rugh, Brigham Young University*

Virginia

Legal Aid Justice Center
Virginia Citizens Consumer Council
Virginia Organizing
Virginia Poverty Law Center

Washington

Economic Opportunity Institute
Unemployment Law Project
Wenatchee for Immigrant Justice

West Virginia

WV Citizen Action

Wisconsin

Wisconsin Indigenous Economic Development Corporation

*Organization listed for identification only.