

Sheriff: Tax refund law generates 100 arrests

State withholds money of those with outstanding warrants

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Anne Arundel County Sheriff Ron Bateman says a new law, which allows Maryland to withhold state tax refunds of those with outstanding warrants, has resulted in some 100 arrests in recent weeks.

The measure was signed into law last May by Gov. Martin O'Malley after it was passed by the General Assembly, at Bateman's urging.

"I'm extremely elated with the success of this program," Bateman said. "I knew it was going to be good, but it's proven to be very successful, which makes me very happy."

Anne Arundel is the only municipality in the state, if not the country, to have such a program, Bateman said. The sheriff said he has been contacted by a law enforcement agency in Nebraska interested in instituting a similar program.

The county Sheriff's Office provides the Comptroller's Office with the names of people with outstanding warrants. When that person files his tax return, the Comptroller's Office holds his tax refund and sends the person a letter with instructions on how to receive his money.

Once the warrant is closed, the refund is released, said Caron Brace, a spokeswoman for Comptroller Peter Franchot.

So far this year, the Comptroller's Office has mailed more than 280 letters to people with outstanding warrants, with more than 130 warrants

closed as a result, Bateman said.

Around 100 of the warrants were closed by arrest, Bateman said.

While the sheriff couldn't say exactly how people many turned themselves in, Bateman speculated that the majority did so as a result of the law.

"People want their money — period," Bateman said. "Sooner or later they're going to have to face the consequences."

With this year's deadline for filing income tax returns still about a month away, Bateman estimated more arrests would be made in the coming weeks.

The county has about 8,000 open warrants and roughly 1,000 new warrants each month.

The program also presents less of a danger for police in serving the warrants, Bateman said.

"People don't just open their door

— there's a lot of danger," he said. "This keeps us from driving around and chasing these people down."

The law applies only to individual tax returns. If a person also owes child support, the law stipulates the money first goes to resolve those issues before a person can collect his tax refund, Bateman said.

While the law is only in effect throughout the rest of 2013, Bateman is lobbying state lawmakers for a five-year extension. Legislation for the extension already has passed the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee.

Bateman said he is scheduled to testify about the legislation in front of the House of Delegates Ways and Means Committee on Friday.

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