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### Sheriff seeks to implement program to close open warrants

#### Comptroller withholds tax refund from those with unsatisfied warrants in certain counties

By Heather Cobun, Times Staff Writer

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If you have an outstanding warrant in Carroll County, it may cost you your state tax refund if Sheriff Jim DeWees gets his way. advertisement

DeWees asked Carroll's delegation to the General Assembly to add Carroll to a growing list of jurisdictions asking the comptroller of Maryland to hold off on cutting a tax refund check to anyone who has an open warrant.

"Anybody that has an outstanding warrant, we shouldn't be sending them their tax refund," said Del. Justin Ready, R-District 5.

Instead of getting a refund check, an individual — the law does not affect a couple filing jointly if one of the individuals has an open warrant — will receive a letter from the comptroller informing them that they must turn themselves in and satisfy the warrant before their check will be sent, DeWees said.

The program was piloted in Anne Arundel County after Sheriff Ron Bateman and Chief Deputy Col. Rick Tabor came up with the idea while walking to the General Assembly and talking about taxes, Tabor said. A bill passed in 2012 to allow the program to operate for one year. It has since been extended through 2018.

Tabor said in two years the Anne Arundel County Sheriff's Office has closed more than 700 open warrants and the process has been seamless.

"It's cut and dry," he said. "If you want your money, take care of your business."

DeWees said Carroll has approximately 1,000 open warrants, mostly for misdemeanors, and a majority of those are for failing to appear for a court date.

"I don't know if it's people who are running from the law or if they just thought it would go away," DeWees said.

The Anne Arundel program, which has since been implemented in Washington County and Baltimore, doesn't strain the resources of the sheriff's office, Tabor said, because most of the work is done by other agencies. The sheriff's office just has to book and process individuals as usual.

Once a person has satisfied the warrant, Tabor said the sheriff's office electronically notifies the comptroller's

office and the refund check is issued.

The program also promotes officer safety, DeWees said, because people turning themselves in is safer than deputies tracking them down and attempting to serve warrants.

"It screams of safety and efficiency," Tabor said.

The program has also been well-received, according to Tabor. In two years, he said he is not aware of any complaints.

Del. Susan Krebs, R-District 5, said she sat in on last year's legislative hearing when Baltimore requested to use the program and described it as a "win-win."

"I think it sounds like a very good idea," Krebs said.

An attempt to expand the program statewide failed in 2014, DeWees said, but he's not sure what the hold up is.

"Quite honestly, I don't know why the whole state doesn't jump on this," he said.

Reach staff writer Heather Cobun at 410-857-7898 or email [heather.cobun@carrollcountytimes.com](mailto:heather.cobun@carrollcountytimes.com).

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