

December 12, 2017

**Proponent Testimony for SB 4 as Passed by the Senate and
Considerations for Improving HB 56**

To the Ohio Senate Criminal Justice Committee

Greetings Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to share imperative information regarding Senate Bill 4 and House Bill 56. Both aim to help survivors of sex trafficking. SB 4, as passed by the Senate, meets the mark. While HB 56 intends to do the same, it leaves behind many – if not most – survivors without meaningful help because it has too many sweeping exceptions; I understand that the House Bill sponsors are considering ways to amend and improve the bill. Please vote to pass SB 4 and help change HB 56 so that all records can be expunged.

My name is Tracy Summers and I am a survivor of sex trafficking and drug addiction. I was trafficked all around Ohio and in other states, from the time I was a teenager. As a result I have criminal records in many places. I recently got my first expungement (in a court that read the current law broadly and expunged all my records there). It was the most amazing, transformative moment since I escaped from trafficking. Now, I will need to have hearings in other courts, where I also have records.

I am not here to give you a black and white narrative of the meaning of human trafficking and how it's ripples affect my life. I am here to advocate for myself and others who are struggling to reclaim our lives.

18th century slave owner, Willie Lynch states, "It is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect, and trust only us." Henry Berry, speaking in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1832, also conveys "We have, as far as possible, closed every avenue in which light may enter their minds. If we could extinguish their capacity to see the light, our work would be complete." Adolph Hitler claims, "If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed." Whether it be 300 years ago or present day, the same scare tactics are being used to establish and maintain mind control over humans.

Over a span of 19 years, I was a victim of human trafficking by four different men. It started when I was only 16 years old: my mother's ex- boyfriend took advantage of the fact that I trusted him and lured me into prostitution for the first time. After that, I was controlled and abused by a series of pimps – brainwashed into thinking that I needed these men for survival. A sick relationship was formed between myself and traffickers who preyed on my weaknesses. The traffickers monitored their girls all the time and kept all the money; the girls were always so scared. I often had bruises, black eyes and busted lips. I was provided shelter and drugs- at only one cost. I must do anything and everything commanded. I had no control. In order to avoid beatings and deprivation of drugs, I

followed the pimps' demands. I was forced to do so many humiliating, illegal things. I wish that I could say that sex trafficking only involves sex crimes such as soliciting and prostitution, but that is not the case. I became the scapegoat while my abusers went under the radar. Selling my body was just the tip of the iceberg.

In 2012, I was at rock bottom. Stripped of my morals and dignity. Emotionally, physically, spiritually dead. At that moment I knew that I would either die at the hands of my pimp or the crimes that he orchestrated would escalate to a life sentence. This was the beginning of my new life journey. So here I stand 5 years later, free from the sex slave industry. I am fortunate in saying that I have escaped that life.

Unfortunately, liberated I was not. Walking away and starting anew is not an option for me. I face many barriers due to my criminal history. Decades of crime accumulated onto my record making it nearly impossible to improve in any area of my life. My first encounter with the workforce began with an employer holding a lengthy rap sheet of non-convictions and various convictions, wanting answers. After many attempts, I was only able to obtain a job at minimum wage and was told to tell no one of my previous arrests. Housing was an obstacle as well. Several landlords denied my application due to unfavorable criminal background checks, causing me to live in less desirable neighborhoods full of crime. Decisions about which career path I should pursue are limited. I want to be a teacher and work in daycares. No matter how much time has lapsed, this is an issue that will never go away for me. Bottom line... I have served jail time, successfully completed classes and seminars, victim's awareness, therapy, paid full restitution to the Courts, the list goes on and on, and so many doors are still closed in my face because of a piece of paper saying I was once a criminal.

When I was granted my first expungement, for about 15 convictions, I felt freer than ever. This is my light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. This is freedom. I am a mother, college student, good employee, volunteer, and productive citizen, and finally I was recognized as a full member of the community. I finally have hope that I can be a teacher.

SB 4 gives survivors this opportunity for freedom, no matter what court they are in. HB 56 should be amended so that any record can be expunged, perhaps with very limited exceptions like in SB 4.

I end this by saying, I am regretful for my mistakes of the past. I have lost a lot of years due to human trafficking. But on that day in 2012, I mustered enough courage to strive for a better life and have been fighting all the while to be a successful member of our society. My past speaks volumes in some people's eyes. As I go to new courts asking for expungements, tracing the path along which I was once trafficked and taking back control, please help me put my past behind me and keep it there. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Tracy Summers