



Jim Hughes

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Sponsor Testimony
House Bill 520
House Criminal Justice Committee
March 13th, 2018

Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the House Criminal Justice committee. Thank you for allowing us to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 520. This bill mirrors recently introduced legislation in the Senate, Senate Bill 267, introduced by Senators Kunze and Brown.

House Bill 520 seeks to increase the penalty for solicitation from a third degree to a first degree misdemeanor. This bill would also increase potential jail time from 60 to 180 days, and allow to court to impose a fine of up to \$2,500. Additionally, judges would be allowed to designate a portion of the increased fine for the Ohio Victims of Human Trafficking fund. According to the Ohio Revised Code, the money in this fund “shall be used for the sole purpose of treating, caring for, rehabilitating, educating, housing, and providing assistance for victims of trafficking in persons.”

Drug abuse consumes people’s lives, leaving them susceptible to fuel their addiction in any way they can. Unfortunately, the opioid crisis has led to a rise in prostitution among women suffering from addiction in our state, and many others. Prostitution-related arrests in Ohio have increased by over 30 percent in recent years. Ohio’s opioid-related deaths have risen by more than 36% since 2015.

This bill is not designed for the sole purpose of cracking down solicitors, but also helping victims of human trafficking and fighting Ohio’s opioid crisis. The Polaris Project, a nonprofit organization that fights modern slavery, says two thirds of human trafficking survivors who were addicted to opioids were already addicted by the time they fell victim to human trafficking. Penalizing solicitors, rather than the women and victims, is a step in the right direction to solving this issue.

If you listen to these women and what they have been going through, you know they need some help. Thank you for allowing us to testify today, and we will be happy to answer any questions from the committee.

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