

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: May 14, 2018

Name: Jaime Blair

Are you representing: Yourself _____ Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Summit County Juvenile Court

Position/Title: Judicial Attorney / magistrate

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes _____ No _____

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): House Bill 461

Specific Issue: Defining minors as victims in commercial sex exchange

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent _____ Interested Party _____

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes _____ No _____

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? _____

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

The age of consent to engage in sexual conduct has no relevance in the determination of whether a minor engaged in commercial sex is a victim of exploitation. The law should accurately reflect the inherent vulnerabilities of juveniles in this context.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.



Turning lives around one child at a time.

**Jaime L. Blair, Judicial Attorney
House Bill 461 Proponent Testimony
April 17, 2018**

Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and the House Criminal Justice Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent of House Bill 461.

For the past five years, the Summit County Juvenile Court has been working to identify and help juvenile victims of human trafficking. It is not uncommon for our youth to first be introduced to the life of trafficking by way of survival sex, which means they are exchanging sex in order to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, or shelter. While no one disputes the existence of runaway, homeless, or displaced youth, it is not generally understood how easily such youth can and do become victims of human trafficking. It can hardly be said that a child freely chooses to offer his or her body when the alternative is going without food or shelter. And this is just one example of how children are more vulnerable to exploitation by virtue of their status.

More times than I wish to recount, I have heard an adolescent girl claim that it was her own idea to post an advertisement of herself for sale on the internet, often with the help of her "boyfriend." I believe this is why the element of compulsion under R.C. § 2905.32 need not be "openly displayed or physically exerted." We know that much of it is psychological. Through extensive training, we have come to understand the specifics of how adolescents' underdeveloped brains create greater risk for them and how well aware traffickers are of this fact.

"By its very nature, prostitution is coercive: if someone *wants* to engage in sex, you don't have to pay her to participate."¹ The current statutory language defining the crime of "trafficking in persons" and "human trafficking" draws the same line as our laws defining the age of consent in the State of Ohio. But human trafficking is about exploitation and not volition. Because domestic sex trafficking hinges on the dynamics of power, control, and vulnerability, the age of consent is irrelevant as a defining factor in determining if someone is being exploited.

Federal law considers any person under the age of 18 who is induced to perform a commercial sex act to be a victim of human trafficking.² There is no justification for drawing the line anywhere short of the protection offered by federal anti-trafficking laws. If we must err to one side, it should be to the side of the child. The proposed changes under House Bill 461 will accomplish this.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to offer testimony today.

¹ Lisa Thompson, Vice President of Policy and Research, National Center on Sexual Exploitation.

² Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPR) of 2013 (22 USC § 7102).