

Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee  
May 22, 2018  
House Bill 461  
Proponent Testimony

On behalf of ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women, I am submitting Proponent Testimony for House Bill 461, sponsored by Representatives Teresa Fedor and Tavia Galonski. ACTION OHIO is a statewide advocacy organization with a focus on domestic violence but also including related forms of abuse (such as human trafficking).

House Bill 461

- Requires a juvenile court to appoint a guardian ad litem for an allegedly delinquent child if the court has reason to believe the act charged in the complaint might be prostitution-related or the child is a victim of trafficking in persons.
- Modifies the abeyance procedure by which a juvenile court may temporarily set aside a complaint for a prostitution-related or other offense related to a minor's human trafficking victimization, pending the completion of diversion actions.
- Removes the distinction in the elements of the offense of "trafficking in persons" regarding victims who are minors under 16 and minors who are 16 or 17 years old.

In recent years Human Trafficking has been identified as a modern day form of slavery. Ohio because of its geographic position in the country has become a crossroads for traffickers, as they pass through the state moving their commodity from place to place for economic gain.

As the general public and elected officials have come to understand this slave trade, it has become clear that juveniles (including 16 and 17 year olds) are often the most vulnerable and unsuspecting victims. Furthermore, traffickers know that some of their customers prefer juveniles for their sexual encounters. Often teenage runaways (including 16 and 17 year olds) get caught in the victim web by force or seduction by traffickers, who convince them that they care about them and will provide for them. Once trapped in the trafficking trade, juvenile victims (including 16 and 17 year olds) have less ability to escape and find help. Aside from experiencing more significant trauma, juveniles are more apt to continue being abused as adults and to lose all hope of a future free from abuse.

House Bill 461 is an effort to provide protection for all minors, including 16 and 17 year olds, in Ohio who are human trafficking victims. This bill seeks to change Ohio law to conform to federal level penalties regarding the age of majority. With the passage of House Bill 461 juveniles ages 16 and 17 will also be considered minors. In this case, prosecutors will not have to prove that these victims were compelled to be trafficked. Trafficking victims who are 16 and 17 deserve the same benefits as juvenile victims younger than 16.

I urge you to support passage of this bill because it will serve as a tool to help 16 and 17 year olds escape from a life of abuse and a future with no hope. These teenagers need protection under Ohio law.

Thanks for the opportunity to share our viewpoint.

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