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Senate Bill 244 Sponsor Testimony
House Criminal Justice Committee
Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Celebrezze and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 244.

In November 2016, the Cuyahoga Regional Human Trafficking Task force was established under the State of Ohio, Attorney General's Office, Organized Crime Commission. This task force is involved with the arrest and prosecution of several individuals for Human Trafficking and Promoting and/or Compelling Prostitution.

Many of the cases investigated by the Task Force involving human trafficking behavior do not meet the prosecution threshold needed to charge and convict for the offense of Trafficking in Persons. However, the cases are usually prosecuted for violations of Promoting Prostitution. It is opined that providing stricter sentencing for repeat offenders of Promoting Prostitution will help in just one of the many challenges faced in combating the complex crime of human trafficking.

Since the inception of the Task Force, there are countless examples of cases involving repeat offenders in Cuyahoga County. One case in particular, focuses on Anthony Hawkins, who had previously been found guilty of promoting prostitution. Hawkins was charged with Promoting Prostitution that involved trafficking two adult victims. For this crime and his past criminal history, he only served three and half years in prison.

SB 244 increases penalties for those found to be guilty of promoting prostitution. This legislation levies increased penalties on repeat offenders as well as those found to be committing additional offenses. The changes are as follows:

1. If the offender has previously been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a violation of this section, the penalty is increased from a fourth-degree felony to a third-degree felony.
2. If the offender is guilty of drug trafficking in addition to promoting prostitution, the penalty is increased from a fourth-degree felony to a third-degree felony.

3. If the offender has two or more prior convictions, the penalty is increased from a third-degree felony to a second-degree felony.

Under the proposed changes, with the two previous convictions of Promoting Prostitution, Hawkins' conviction on November 9, 2017 would have been an F2, subjecting him to a prison term ranging from two to eight years, and preventing him from victimizing more women.

By providing the means to adequately penalize offenders, these increased penalties are necessary changes the justice system needs to counter this cruel industry.

Thank you, Chairman Manning and members of the committee, for allowing me to speak to this legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.