



November 21, 2018

To: Criminal Justice Committee

Nathan H. Manning, Chair

Jeffrey S. Resabek, Vice Chair

Nicholas Celebrezze, Ranking Member

Jim Butler

Robert R. Cupp

George F. Lang

John M. Rogers

Bill Seitz

Tavia Galonski

Bernadine Kennedy Kent

Laura Lanese

Jim Hughes

Dorothy Pelanda

Greetings Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and members of the House of Representatives Criminal Justice Committee. I urge you to support H.B. 461 so that sixteen and seventeen-year-old human trafficking victims will be afforded adequate protections under our human-trafficking laws.

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Northeast Ohio Human Trafficking Law Clinic, a nonprofit law clinic whose mission is to advocate for sex-trafficking victims. The clinic has represented many victims of sex trafficking and advocates for survivors in their efforts to attain justice, reintegrate in society, and restore their lives. I am the Director of the NEO Human Trafficking Law Clinic and am also a member of the Legislative Sub-Committee of the Human Trafficking Commission, the CORE Committee for Northeast Ohio chapter of S.O.A.P. (“Save our Adolescents from Prostitution”), and the Education Committee of the Cleveland’s Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking.

Background

Human trafficking, in particular sex trafficking, is the fastest-growing crime in the United States and worldwide. It is a \$150 billion industry that’s growth is attributed to many factors, including the increasing drug epidemic and the spread of internet and social-media usage. Ohio ranks fourth in the number of human-trafficking cases reported to the national hotline. Northeast Ohio has seen a significant increase in the number of sex-trafficking victims in the past few years. More pointedly, once victims are identified, many are unable to get the physical, legal, psychological, and financial services they need to stay “out of the life” and begin the restorative process.

H.B. 461 Solves Significant Problems

House Bill 461 is crucially important for Ohio's youth because, to date, we are one of the *last* states that has not revised its human-trafficking statute to afford adequate protections to all minors under the age of 18. This legislation will mirror the federal legislation and legislation in *all but one other state* by removing the "force, fraud, and coercion" requirement for 16 and 17-year-old victims. Without this law, many of Ohio's children will remain unprotected while being victimized in the worst and most unimaginable ways.

Teenagers who are involved in commercial sexual exploitation are victims, not criminals. Ohio's current laws allow these exploited youth to be criminalized – a measure which only compounds the complex trauma they have already suffered.

House Bill 461 would change the lives of many of Ohio's youth by providing them protections and allowing them to move forward with their lives.

Sincerely,

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