

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

BILL NO: Senate Bill 13
TITLE: Apply same human trafficking offenses to all victims under 18
COMMITTEE: House criminal justice
DATE: February 13th 2020
POSITION: Support

Dear Chairperson Lang, Vice Chairperson Plummer and Committee Members,

We are both pediatric physicians at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland, OH and are submitting this testimony to the Committee in avid support of Senate Bill 13. We have worked on anti-trafficking issues pertaining to children for the past 8 years. During this time we have engaged in various initiatives, including research, education, direct clinical care and legislative advocacy. Notably, our recent clinical and research efforts in Cleveland have focused on improving identification of child trafficking in the medical setting. We are also co-founders of a medical home to provide long-term trauma-informed services to child trafficking survivors. Through these efforts, we have gained professional knowledge on the nature of human trafficking in Ohio, the high risk populations, and these patient's road to recovery.

Multiple national and international organizations, including the Polaris Project and the International Organization for Migration, have demonstrated peaks in incidence of child trafficking between the ages of 15-17. This data is consistent with our experience as physicians, and many of the trafficked children that have been identified at our institution are aged 16-17.

Ohio is a leader in anti-trafficking initiatives with a prominent Human Trafficking Task Force and many NGOs paving the way to combat this pervasive crime. Unfortunately, Ohio falls behind all other 49 states in the country by failing to protect children aged 16 and 17 under the law. Ohio is the only state where this prevalent and extremely vulnerable population of trafficked youth have to prove force, fraud or coercion to be considered victims of human trafficking.

We recognize in other realms of the law that individuals under 18 are children, therefore trafficking victims aged 16 and 17 should be treated as such. Many of these children have faced years of abuse, homelessness, and through their trafficking situation repeated violence and trauma. As physicians working with survivors of child trafficking through our medical home, we recognize that complete recovery is not possible without legal protection. These children deserve status as victims under the law along with other children who are trafficked, to facilitate their road to full recovery.

We implore the committee to pass Senate Bill 13 this calendar year to protect Ohio's most vulnerable youth and provide them with the advantage they need to transition from victim to survivor. We sincerely thank the committee for their attention to this important issue and for their time in reading this testimony.

Sincerely,

Preeti Panda M.D. and Anjali Garg M.D.
Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital

This testimony reflects our position on this issue as individuals. We do not speak on behalf of our institution/place of employment.

For questions and additional information, please contact Preeti Panda at preeti.panda2@uhhospitals.org.