



# Survivor's Ink

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**To: Ohio House Judiciary Committee**

Chairman Jim Butler

Vice Chair Nathan Manning

Ranking Member Greta Johnson

Rep. Niraj Antani

Rep. Margaret Conditt

Rep. Robert Cupp

Rep. Johnathan Dever

Rep. Robert McColley

Rep. Dorothy Pelanda

Rep. Jeffery Rezabek

Rep. Emilia Strong Sykes

Rep. Kristin Boggs

Rep. Nicholas Celebrezze

**From: Melanie Dillon, Survivor Advocate on behalf of Survivor's Ink**

**Date: April 28, 2016**

**Re: In Support of Sub H.B. 268**

Good afternoon, Chairman Butler, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Johnson, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for Sub. H.B. 268. My name is Melanie Dillon, and I am a survivor of human trafficking, here today to represent the organization Survivor's Ink. On behalf of the mission of our organization, survivors of human trafficking and as a survivor myself, I humbly ask you to support this bill, as it makes the important and necessary strides in the fight against human trafficking and offers proper support of its victims.

Let me begin by offering a bit of information on who we are and what we do. Survivor's Ink is a survivor-led organization that helps victims and survivors of human trafficking. Our primary mission is to cover branding tattoos and scars which victims receive while they are being trafficked so that they can move on with their lives without the constant reminders of their past. However, we also conduct street outreach to provide aid to current victims, as well as resource connection, advocacy, and mentorship to survivors. In addition, we offer victim identification and prevention education through the voice and unique perspective of a survivor. We are here today because, as our mantra states, "As long as Survivor's Ink is in existence, we will fight against human trafficking and for the proper treatment and care of its victims."

Thankfully, there are others testifying who have, or will, educate you on statistics and the prevalence of human trafficking. There are many aspects of this bill that are important to the cause. But, I am mainly here to give you the real voices of survivors and their testimonials on how a bill like this would help them break the physiological chains of human trafficking and build a life for themselves and their families. This bill is an important step forward in the fight against human trafficking as it provides the necessary

legal tools for a victim to fight for their future, giving them hope to work towards a clean expunged record. An expunged record breaks down barriers to obtaining basic things like applying for an apartment, obtaining credit, or securing a job. Without an expunged record, victims of human trafficking are denied access to basic opportunities to be a vibrant citizen and build a stable life for themselves. In fact, without the ability to expunge a records caused by being a victim of human trafficking, we as a society are complicit in encouraging and enslaving people who are trying to fight for a new life.

I will now read the direct quotes from a few of the lives this bill will directly impact:

“Hello, my name is Sabrina Briggs and I honestly feel my past is holding me back from the person I am trying so hard to be! My arrest record is everything I'm not. I hope that expungement will be considered for those of us that can prove we would have never committed those crimes had we not been under the influence of drugs or pressure from a violent man. I begin college next month but could see so many doors opening for me if this were granted.”

“My name is Lyndzy Donovan and I'm briefly gonna explain why not being able to get my felonies expunged from my record has interfered with living a sober, honest life today. In the past five years I've had to work ten times harder than most to get where I am today. To get into a good cosmetology school I had to get many referral letters saying I'm not a bad person and then wait six months to be approved. While in school I searched hard to get an internship before graduating to get my foot in the door with an upscale salon. Had I not, with my record, they wouldn't have given me the time of day. Finding housing has also been extremely difficult. In a couple years I'm planning on buying a house, but with my background this sometimes seems almost impossible as many places won't deal with me after discovering my background, and this has me fearful and almost discouraged. I'm no longer that strung-out, law-breaking citizen and have worked hard daily not to be. Having my record expunged will open doors to a better future for me, and I would be truly grateful.”

Now, I would like to give you the story of the founder of Survivor's Ink, Jennifer Kempton, who unfortunately could not be here today due to other obligations. You all may be familiar with her from her work in the community or her strong voice as a survivor featured in CNN International and many other media stories appearing in the Dispatch and local Columbus TV stations. Here is her statement on the matter. “My name is Jennifer Kempton. I am a 34-year-old survivor of sex trafficking. I was granted the current human trafficking expungement which removed my prostitution, loitering, and soliciting charges since the court deemed me a victim at the time they were committed. However, I have several drug charges and a theft charge remaining on my record. The drug charges came because drugs were the only coping mechanism I knew to deal with the trauma I was enduring in my life. The theft charge was from stealing two pairs of underwear from Sears

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because I had literally nothing. Now, I am the founder of an organization that has had global recognition, as well as winning the Ohio Liberators Award and a proclamation from the US Senate thanking us for the direct services we provide for survivors. I am also a trusted educator, advocate, and motivational speaker, among other things. However, despite what I have proven myself to be fully capable of, I wouldn't be able to walk into McDonald's and get a job running the cash register because my record says I'm a thieving drug addict. The expansion of the expungement law would not only enable me to do more, but provide a brighter future for me, my organization, and my family.”

Finally, I want to offer my personal thoughts on the matter. This is a life changing initiative for me. I am not only a survivor of sex trafficking, I'm a mother, a full-time college student and I work 2 full-time jobs at minimum wage because of my record. Most of my charges are drug charges, and are directly related to my time of enslavement. I desperately want to secure a job in the culinary arts after I graduate, however, with my current record, I know my job opportunities will be limited. I have worked tirelessly to better my life and will even be graduating the CATCH program this coming September. This bill will offer me a fresh start and a better future for me and my children.

We are not alone. There are so many other survivors who have charges that come with a life of being trafficked. I could spend hours giving testimony of my survivor sisters and brothers. It is important you understand that enslaved victims of human trafficking are forced to do many illegal acts outside of the current environment law just to survive. Granting this bill will enable me and so many others the chance at a promising future despite our horrific pasts.

## CONCLUSION

Sub. H.B. 268 offers survivors of human trafficking a promise for our future. In our own words, you have witnessed the relief this measure would procure. I urge you to remember our stories and to acknowledge the countless people you can help, as well as the numerous possibilities that would be obtainable in our lives due to this measure.

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