

Testimony on Senate Bill 13 –
Apply same human trafficking offenses to all victims under 18
Before the Senate Judiciary Committee
The Honorable John Eklund, Chair
By Karen Rainey, LWV Ohio Specialist
March 4, 2019

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, and members of the committee:

I am Karen Rainey, a volunteer specialist for the League of Women Voters of Ohio.

The League is a member-driven, grassroots organization that adopts its positions for advocacy through member study and support. Our study of human trafficking led to the adoption of positions that align well with the provisions of the proposed legislation to protect minors.

Specifically, the League believes that all minors who have been commercially sexually exploited or forced into slave labor should be legally considered as victims. While previous legislation has included provisions that enable trafficking victims to reclaim their lives, not all minors are treated equally. Certain compromises were made in previous legislation in order to ensure passage, the most problematic being that 16- and 17-year-olds are not treated in the same way as younger victims. This bill will rectify that situation and bring Ohio's law into agreement with the federal law, which defines all minors under 18 as victims and entitled to the same legal protections. By removing the age distinction, this bill also simplifies the prosecution of traffickers.

The hurt that is inflicted on a young person who is trafficked is no less on a sixteen-year-old than a fifteen-year-old. There should be no difference in their treatment.

Ohio stands alone among the states in treating trafficked 16- and 17-year olds differently from other minors, but this is not how Ohio should stand out. This bill passed the House by a large margin last December, but too late for the Senate to act. The Senate now has the opportunity to move this bill, and we respectfully ask that you enact this legislation as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your time.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.