

Senate Judiciary Committee
Wednesday, March 6, 2019

SB 13 – Human Trafficking-Juveniles
Proponent Testimony

My name is Phyllis Carlson-Riehm and I represent ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women, a statewide domestic violence coalition. This testimony is presented in support of Senate Bill 13.

SB 13

- Requires a juvenile court to appoint a guardian ad litem for an allegedly delinquent child if the court has reason to believe the act charged in the complaint might be a specified prostitution-related offense or that the child is a victim of trafficking in persons.
- Modifies the abeyance procedure by which a juvenile court may temporarily set aside a complaint against a child for a specified prostitution-related offense or for another offense related to the victimization of the child by human trafficking, pending the completion of diversion actions.
- Removes the distinction in the elements of the offense of “trafficking in persons” regarding victims who are minors under age 16 and minors who are age 16 or 17.

In recent years Human Trafficking has been identified as a modern day form of slavery. Ohio, because of its geographic position in the country, has become a crossroads for traffickers, as they pass through the state moving their commodity from place to place for economic gain. And some of their destinations include Ohio when there are large events in one or another area of the state, especially when large numbers of men are the main audience (as in The Arnold Event).

As the general public and elected officials have come to understand this new slave trade, it has become clear that juveniles (including 16- and 17-year-olds) are often the most vulnerable and unsuspecting victims of traffickers. Furthermore, traffickers are aware that some of their customers prefer teenage girls for their sexual encounters.

Often teenage runaways get caught in the victim web by force or seduction by traffickers, who convince them that they care about them and will provide for them. Once trapped in the trafficking trade, juvenile victims have less ability to escape and find help. Aside from experiencing more significant trauma, juveniles are more apt to continue being abused as adults and to lose all hope of a future free from abuse.

Senate Bill 13 is an effort to provide protection for all minors, including 16- and 17-year-olds in Ohio, who are human trafficking victims. This bill seeks to change Ohio law to confirm to federal level penalties regarding the age of majority. With the passage of Senate Bill 13 juveniles ages 16 and 17 will also be considered minors. In this case, prosecutors will not have to prove that these victims were compelled to be trafficked. Trafficking victims who are 16 and 17 deserve the same benefits as juvenile victims younger than 16.

I urge your support for the passage of Senate Bill 13, because it will serve as a tool to help 16- and 17-year-olds escape from a life of abuse and a future with no hope.

Thanks for your consideration of our viewpoints.

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