

41ST HOUSE DISTRICT

LUCAS COUNTY

Committees

Vice Chair Criminal Justice,
Higher Education, Primary and
Secondary Education, Economic
and Workforce Development



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**State Representative Joshua E. Williams
Ohio House of Representatives**

Chairman Abrams, Ranking Member Brown, and fellow members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony with my colleague and joint sponsor Representative Richardson on House Bill 385.

In 2022, Ohio ranked 4th in the nation in human trafficking cases. Between 2007-2020, there were 2,813 recorded human trafficking cases in the state of Ohio, 97% of which were sex trafficking. When people think of sex trafficking, they often imagine a stranger pulling up in a van and kidnapping a young victim, or keeping a young woman locked in chains. These perceptions, however, are mostly myth: Most traffickers know their victims well; many also know their victims' families. Traffickers rely on building trust and a close relationship with their targets by filling the victim's needs and, in the process, identifying vulnerabilities. Then they exploit those vulnerabilities to compel their victims into being trafficked.

Labor trafficking, too, is a problem throughout Ohio and the United States. Many people incorrectly believe that only undocumented immigrants are trafficked for labor, but it can happen to those who enter the country legally

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and to U.S. citizens. Furthermore, labor trafficking can happen within legitimate businesses — construction, food service, agriculture, and others — where it hides in plain sight and makes it harder to identify.

Most often, human traffickers prey on the most vulnerable people in our society: the homeless, indigent, those with substance abuse problems and minors. Victims of human trafficking often have no recourse to escape their circumstances and are often forced to engage in criminal activity by their victimizers.

The criminal record that many survivors acquire during their trafficking is a significant barrier to their reintegration into society. This cruel reality prevents many survivors from escaping their circumstances and benefits those who engage in human trafficking. This bill will prevent this continued injustice by expanding the predicate offenses that qualify for expungements. This will allow more victims of human trafficking to qualify for expungement of their criminal record and encourages reintegration into society. At the same time, this legislation is not offering blanket immunity. Applicants for expungement must present “clear and convincing evidence” that the applicant's offense was a result of the applicant having been a victim of human trafficking.

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I am proud to be a champion of this bill and thank Rep. Richardson for inviting me to be a joint sponsor. This legislation has the potential to change the lives of countless survivors in Ohio and is a key piece in breaking the cycle of trafficking and abuse in our state.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation, Rep. Richardson and I look forward to answering any questions from the committee.