

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 385 (HB385) My name is Tracy McGinley and I am a Teaching Professor at Bowling Green State University. In addition, I serve as a volunteer with organizations that work to educate about human trafficking and assist in the prevention, identification, and empowerment of victims and survivors. For the past year I have had the pleasure of volunteering with a wonderful group of people in the Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Initiative Public Awareness Subcommittee. Knowing that runaways and missing persons can often be victims of human trafficking connected me to Cleveland Family Center for Missing Children and Adults, where I serve as the on the board as vice-president. I am also co-founder of the Bowling Green State University Labor Trafficking Research and Education Initiative.

My focus on human trafficking was developed early in the 2000s as I wrote a book on identity theft. During that time, it became evident that identity theft could be used to facilitate a variety of crimes, including human trafficking. In addition, it quickly became evident that human trafficking could also be linked to many other crimes. It was also through research, that I began to understand that human trafficking could be part of larger organized crime rings, or it could be a smaller local trafficker. No matter how large or small, the cases needed to be investigated thoroughly. These investigations require an understanding of the multi-faceted needs of human trafficking victims.

Recently, my colleague and I started a human trafficking coalition in Erie County called Seeds of Empowerment. This was an extension of the Women's Empowerment Group that we started in our county jail. One of the benefits of the Women's Empowerment Group is the opportunity to reach out to women who have been arrested and help to identify if they have been victims of human trafficking. In addition, we focus group discussions on ways that can empower women and help them to meet their own needs and remove some of the at-risk factors that can make them vulnerable to trafficking.

It is not uncommon for the victims of human trafficking to also be forced to commit criminal activity by their traffickers. According to a 2020 study by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, the key takeaway focuses on the double exploitation and victimization of the persons in the study. This double exploitation takes place through sex trafficking, but also through the traffickers forcing the victims to commit criminal activity so that the traffickers' names are not associated with the criminal activity. These trafficking victims are forced to commit crimes that are at greater risk of apprehension by law enforcement, therefore the victims get arrested while the traffickers avoid arrest and prosecution. As a result, the victims have multiple charges on their records that impact their lives in various ways. With the way the system works, some of the charges, like solicitation or loitering, may be dismissed making expungement challenging if not impossible.

Listening to survivors and those who have been incarcerated with charges related to their victimization, there are a multitude of challenges they face when they are trying to leave a life of human trafficking. The multi-faceted needs of trafficking victims need to be addressed as the survivors are trying to rebuild their lives. HB385 is an important step to help address part of the complex needs of survivors and allow them to empower themselves by increasing access to expungement.

I want to thank Representatives Williams and Richardson for bringing forth HB385 and their continued dedication and attention to this issue.