

**Interested Party Testimony submitted to the
Senate General Government Committee
Kirsti Mouncey, President and CEO, The Collaborative to End Human Trafficking
May 10, 2023**

Good morning, Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate General Government Committee. My name is Kirsti Mouncey and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking (Collaborative). The Collaborative leads Greater Cleveland's Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking, a multi-disciplinary group working together to develop a comprehensive and coordinated response to human trafficking in Northeast Ohio.

Started in 2007, the Collaborative is a 70-member strong nonprofit that includes mental health facilities, the county offices of the Sheriff and Prosecutor, tourism organizations like Destination Cleveland, our robust hospital system, and many municipalities and their police, fire, and EMS divisions. We provide specialized core training and technical assistance to equip organizations and individuals with the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to address human trafficking through increasing public awareness, delivering tailored trainings, and facilitating multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Human trafficking is a prevalent, yet often unrecognized and underreported issue in Northeast Ohio. Those at highest risk of being sex or labor trafficked are the most vulnerable children in our country. The average age at which youth are being lured into such exploitive situations is approximately 13 years of age.

When we think of human trafficking- we think of rescuing a person from a horrific situation in which they were held captive. We think they are free now; they are good to live their life. The truth is far from it: a person spends an average of 10 years in the life of trafficking in which they make their trafficker hundreds of thousands in profit to the detriment of their mental and physical health, education, and contributions to society – and the result is PTSD, trauma, the inability to parent children, addiction and sometimes early death are just the tip of the iceberg of consequences. In addition, the vulnerabilities someone experiences prior to being trafficked are the very things traffickers' prey on – these include youth in the foster care system, kids kicked out of their home (it takes an average of 48 hours for a homeless child to be picked up by a trafficker), sexually abused and neglected children. A recent study found that trauma costs taxpayers \$458 billion nationally; this equates to more than \$3,300 per person in the United States.

When a trafficking victim finally exits the life of trafficking it takes them another 10 years before they are "restored" to a life that resembles that of a non-trafficked person. The resources needed for that "restoration" are vast and extensive, they span from crisis intervention services to basic needs, education and job training, legal services, housing, medical, mental health,

addiction, trauma treatment, to name a few. No organization or system alone can provide comprehensive services, and it requires a trauma informed coordinated response to nit that “restoration plan” together. Finally, systems are often overwhelmed by the rapid response required, such as housing a victim in the middle of the night, or the trauma response of someone with active PTSD who has been threatened, forced, and coerced to not trust police and other first responders.

The conduit or intermediary to these coordinated efforts are anti-human trafficking coalitions, such as the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking in Cuyahoga County, and the newly formed Lorain County Collaborative. We work hard to build these trauma response efforts in our community by fostering relationships and trust between providers, and collective impact approaches to create innovative solutions to address the problem. Coalitions like ours raise awareness to the issue, train thousands of community members and coalition partners on what human trafficking looks like and how providers and first responders can intervene. We mobilize our communities to create unified data systems so we can better understand the prevalence of trafficking, but what is needed are system-wide screening mechanisms and training on unified trauma informed responses. We firmly believe that can ultimately find ways to prevent this from happening in the first place. Coalitions advocate for the rights of trafficking victims through policy and laws, and we are doing this without dedicated funding resources.

Ohio has been focused on the issue of eradicating human trafficking in recent years and both the Governor and the Attorney General’s office have active Human Trafficking Task Forces. In fact, I sit on the AG’s Human Trafficking Task Force. The legislature has supported numerous efforts aimed at reducing human trafficking, and we are appreciative of the General Assembly’s work to address this crisis.

However, there is much more work to do. At an event in March, Ohio Attorney General Yost acknowledged that "We are not going to arrest our way out of this human trafficking problem." I believe that more must be done preventatively to protect our youth from being trafficked in the first place.

We are requesting \$300,000 each fiscal year through the Attorney General’s office to help fund a collaboration with our neighbors in Lorain County. We are seeking your support to formalize an enhanced trauma response network for trafficked and at-risk youth in Cuyahoga and Lorain Counties.

We know from our work that victims and their traffickers are not restricted by county borders. Working together will enable both organizations to establish the infrastructure needed to offer immediate trauma informed placement services to trafficked and vulnerable youth. This partnership will allow more seamless sharing of data and foster a collaborative approach to preventing this crime, and I ask for your support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify; I would be happy to take any questions you may have.