

Proponent Testimony on HB 47
House Judiciary Committee
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Collaborative to End Human Trafficking

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 47. My name is Kirsti Mouncey, and I am the President and CEO of the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking (CEHT), an organization dedicated to ensuring a coordinated, trauma-informed response to survivors while promoting prevention efforts focused on stopping trafficking before it begins. As the backbone organization of a 75+ organization of Cuyahoga Counties Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition called Greater Cleveland's Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking, we provide strategic leadership to create social change.

Human trafficking is not an abstract issue; it is a crisis impacting vulnerable individuals throughout Ohio. Sadly, our state remains a national hotspot for trafficking due to its extensive highway system, economic disparities, and large population centers. Although Ohio has made significant progress in combatting trafficking, we now confront new and rapidly evolving threats and new challenges to combatting trafficking. At CEHT, we work with survivors who have faced the devastating impacts of this exploitation. Our coalition has been working towards a more unified approach to combating human trafficking, and HB 47 addresses many of the gaps in the status quo of legal statute in the State of Ohio.

The language of HB 47 will create more stringent penalties for those who partake in the trafficking of people. The bill lowers the culpable mental state for commission of the offense of human trafficking from knowingly to recklessly and therefore increases the mandatory prison terms for those who recklessly engage in the crime of human trafficking. This bill also modifies existing law, so that legal ramifications for the offense of kidnapping apply to all victims under the age of 18, rather than the age of 13. This sends a message to those who partake in this despicable crime that we will prosecute those involved in human trafficking and victims will get justice for the circumstances they have been involuntarily put through. While this bill focuses more on the legal ramifications of partaking in human trafficking and the abduction of people, however, it sends a clear message of support to those victims and survivors of human trafficking.

At CEHT, one of our main goals is prevention of human trafficking across the State of Ohio. HB 47, the Human Trafficking Prevention Act, helps organizations like ours, as well as survivors and victims of human trafficking, to be one step closer to the ultimate goal of stopping trafficking before it begins.

Chair Thomas and Members of the Committee, the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking fully supports House Bill 47. This legislation represents a vital step toward modernizing our legal protections, holding perpetrators accountable, and protecting Ohioans from human trafficking.

Thank you for your leadership on this matter and for your commitment to safeguarding Ohioans from exploitation. I welcome any questions you may have.