



**Dr. Paul McPherson, MD**  
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**Akron Children's**  
**Proponent Testimony, Ohio House Bill 47 (HB 47)**  
**Ohio House Judiciary Committee**  
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Chair Thomas, Vice-Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and members of the House Judiciary Committee –

My name is Dr. Paul McPherson, and I am child abuse pediatrician and the director of the Children at Risk Evaluation (CARE) Center at Akron Children's. I appreciate the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 47 (HB 47), the Human Trafficking Prevention Act that is intended to increase the penalty for human trafficking of a minor or person with a developmental disability, in addition to kidnapping and abduction. I'd also like to express thanks on behalf of Akron Children's to the primary sponsors of HB 47, State Representatives Josh Williams and Nick Santucci for their initiative in introducing this legislation, as well as many of their colleagues who have cosponsored the bill.

If implemented, HB 47 would increase penalties for those who engage in human trafficking activity to include significant changes to mandatory sentencing for perpetrators, as well as changes the definition of many who fall victim to these crimes. Notably, this legislation would amend ORC Sec. 2905.01 to enhance penalties for human traffickers whose victims are under age 18.

The CARE Center at Akron Children's evaluates and initiates treatment for children of suspected physical or sexual abuse and neglect. We have a team of doctors, nurses and social workers who see children and teens referred by private physicians, law enforcement agencies, child protection agencies and other community agencies. We also provide consultation when abuse is suspected of a child on an inpatient hospital unit.

Unfortunately, enhanced screening for human trafficking of the children and adolescents we serve has become a necessary protocol of the treatment we provide, not only at the CARE Center but even in our emergency rooms where patients often first present. Human trafficking is modern-day slavery with its victims presenting to pediatric health care providers with a variety of complaints including infections, injuries or mental health disorders. Sexual exploitation of a minor is the most common type of human trafficking identified at Akron Children's – and victims often do not recognize that they are being exploited.

HB 47 provides a proper adjustment to the penalties for perpetrators who engage in human trafficking and addresses the reality of the age of those who fall victim to their crimes. This bill has the potential to be lifesaving for many children and adolescents. It would result in the state of Ohio taking a step forward in protecting the most vulnerable in our communities. Please support Ohio House Bill 47.