

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 447
House Judiciary Committee
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Collaborative to End Human Trafficking
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Good morning, Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the Judiciary 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's mission is to lead, empower, and connect our community to eradicate human trafficking. 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. I serve as a member of the Attorney General's Human Trafficking Initiative where I Co-chair the Research/Gap Analysis & Data Subcommittee, and I am a member on the Governor's Human Trafficking Task Force.

Survivors of human trafficking endure years of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse — including coercion, captivity, humiliation, and a total loss of autonomy. These are not isolated harms; they are profound violations of human dignity that leave lifelong impacts. Survivors who were trafficked through force, fraud, or coercion deserve full and fair compensation for the totality of their suffering, regardless of their income level or ability to demonstrate financial loss.

Many survivors were exploited as minors or under circumstances where they never had formal employment or documented income. As a result, it is often impossible for them to demonstrate traditional "economic" losses such as lost wages or earnings. In these cases, noneconomic damages — for pain, suffering, trauma, and loss of freedom — are the only meaningful form of restitution.

Placing restrictive caps on these damages risks compounding the very injustice that survivors endured. By limiting what the legal system can recognize as harm, we risk reinforcing the same power imbalances and silencing mechanisms their traffickers once used against them.

Civil suits are a crucial path to justice and restitution for trafficking survivors. — particularly in cases against third parties who enabled or profited from exploitation, such as hotels, landlords, or employers who turned a blind eye. These institutions often played a role in creating or sustaining the conditions that allowed trafficking to continue unchecked.

When civil damages are capped too low, there is little incentive for such institutions to change their practices or implement stronger safeguards. Meaningful noneconomic damages are not only a matter of fairness to survivors — they are an essential deterrent to prevent future exploitation and ensure accountability at every level of the system.

I'd like to thank Representative Stewart for championing this legislation. While we would like to see the damage caps removed completely, this legislation represents a meaningful step in the right direction toward restoring justice for survivors. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.