

Proponent Testimony on HB 84
House Technology & Innovation Committee
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Chair Claggett, Vice Chair Workman, Ranking Member Mohamed, and members of the House Technology & Innovation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 84. 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.

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 in the digital realm. The rise of artificial intelligence and its growing use to create explicit and fabricated images has introduced a dangerous new tool for traffickers and exploiters. These images, often referred to as deepfake pornography, have become instruments of coercion, blackmail, and entrapment, enabling predators to manipulate and control their victims in ways our current laws do not entirely address.

At CEHT, we work daily with survivors who have faced the devastating impacts of digital exploitation. One survivor has courageously shared her story, highlighting the urgent need for House Bill 84. I'd like to share some of that here.

Taylor is a survivor of human trafficking and image-based sexual abuse. She sent me this: I write to inform you of the urgency to pass the Innocence Act. We uphold a responsibility to shield children from explicit content, just as we do with buying alcohol, gambling, and smoking. Yet, age verification processes for such online platforms have not been made legally required in some states until recently. Age verification of explicit content is one step forward to protecting those most vulnerable. These websites can be and have been harmful. The stories of countless survivors and the discovery found in 25 lawsuits have revealed the truth behind platforms like Pornhub and its parent company Mindgeek/Aylo. My exploitation was made available to the global public, for free, downloadable, and with no meaningful or effective restriction for over 10 years. Children could easily view this material, along with the countless other criminal abuse videos and child sexual abuse material that these websites have been proven to show. This point is paramount in addressing that age verification goes far beyond just accessing adult content. Legally required age and consent verification measures need to be in place for those individuals depicted in the videos as well. To this day, 10 years later there are still numerous videos of me uploaded to over 100 explicit websites.

Her experience is not unique. Traffickers, abusers, and exploiters have learned to use technology as a weapon, targeting individuals—especially women and minors—while largely

remaining anonymous and evading accountability. This form of digital exploitation has opened a new door to trafficking, and without clear legal consequences, perpetrators will continue to act with impunity.

House Bill 84 is a crucial step toward tackling this crisis. The legislation enhances legal protections by making the creation and distribution of deepfake pornography illegal, ensuring that those who commit such offenses are held accountable. The bill categorizes first-time violations as a fourth-degree felony, escalating to a third-degree felony for repeat violations, acknowledging the severe harm these actions can cause. It also establishes a private right of action for victims, empowering survivors of digital sexual exploitation to seek injunctive relief, compensatory damages, and punitive damages against offenders. This measure is vital, as victims frequently endure significant emotional, reputational, and financial harm with limited options under current law. Furthermore, HB 84 takes proactive steps to prevent minors from encountering harmful online content by requiring organizations to verify the age of users accessing adult material. This provision recognizes the impact of unregulated digital access on the grooming and exploitation of vulnerable youth, an issue that has led to an increasing number of trafficking cases. The bill also tackles the distribution of nonconsensual sexual images, both real and fabricated, acknowledging that such violations have enduring consequences for survivors and must be met with strict legal repercussions.

Other states, including Texas, Utah, and Kansas, have already enacted legislation to regulate deepfake pornography and establish stronger safeguards against online sexual exploitation. Ohio must keep pace. Every day we delay, more individuals—especially young women and minors—are at greater risk of being targeted by traffickers and abusers who take advantage of these legal loopholes. Human trafficking does not occur in a vacuum. It flourishes in environments where vulnerabilities are exploited, and accountability is lacking. By passing House Bill 84, Ohio will deliver a clear message that we will not permit technology to become a weapon used to manipulate, exploit, and traffic individuals.

Chair Claggett and Members of the Committee, the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking fully supports House Bill 84. This legislation represents a vital step toward modernizing our legal protections, holding perpetrators accountable, and protecting Ohioans from digital exploitation that may result in 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.