

House Bill 96
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kirsti Mouncey, President & CEO
Collaborative to End Human Trafficking

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 86. 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.

In the last state budget, \$4.5 million each fiscal year was allocated to combat human trafficking through the Office of Criminal Justice Services within the Department of Public Safety. This funding has been invaluable. For context, the continued reduction in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding threatens the stability of many survivor services, making state investment more essential than ever. That is why I am here today to urge continued and increased support for the Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) line item to guarantee that prevention efforts, data collection, and enhancements to screening processes stay a priority. Screening tools play a crucial role in identifying survivors early, particularly among high-risk groups such as youth in foster care and those involved in the juvenile justice system. Expanding trauma-informed training and funding for technology upgrades that will enhance screening documentation and tracking across all organizations who might touch trafficking is vital. We must begin to focus our efforts on a coordinated screening, tracking and response system to ensure survivors receive immediate and comprehensive support. I'm proud to say that in Cuyahoga County, all the right pieces and players are in place to ensure these goals become a reality.

Ohio has been at the forefront of tackling human trafficking, but without sustained and increased funding, we risk losing the progress we've achieved. Survivors require long-term support to heal, rebuild, and move forward; state investment ensures that organizations like ours can continue to coordinate these essential services.

Chair Schaffer and the Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, the work that is being done in Ohio is saving lives and improving our communities, but there are

so many areas of this issue that remain underfunded and remain an issue for our state. With your ongoing commitment, we can expand our efforts, enhance our prevention strategies, and ensure that every survivor in Ohio has access to the necessary resources. Thank you for your leadership on this matter and for your commitment to safeguarding Ohioans from exploitation. I welcome any questions you may have.