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State Representative Joshua E. Williams
Ohio House of Representatives

Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and fellow members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB 47, the Human Trafficking Prevention Act.

As of 2022, Ohio ranked 4th in the nation in human trafficking cases[1]. Between 2007 and 2020, 2,813 cases of human trafficking were reported, a fraction of the total amount of trafficking that goes unreported. My own city of Toledo is a key strategic gateway for traffickers in the state of Ohio. Toledo is ranked as the fourth largest trafficking gateway in the nation, exploited for its proximity to the Canadian border, Lake Erie and its status as a transportation and shipping hub[2]. Likewise, Rep. Santucci's district of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley function as a hotspot for trafficking as well, for similar reasons. Representative Santucci and I have partnered on this legislation to put an end to human trafficking in in our respective regions and in that state of Ohio. This legislation puts traffickers on notice: if you engage in human trafficking in Ohio, you will face life in prison.

In Ohio and across the nation, minors are targeted disproportionately for sex trafficking. Minors deserve special protection from traffickers that the law currently does not provide. The Human Trafficking

[1] https://abc6onyourside.com/news/local/state-invests-more-into-ending-human-trafficking-as-ohio-ranks-4th-in-most-reportedcases
[2] https://discover.hubpages.com/politics/Toledo-Ohio-Third-Largest-City-for-Child-Sex-Trafficking-and-Slavery

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Prevention Act changes the enhancement that applies to the age of the victim from 13 years or younger to anyone under the age of 18. Under this legislation, any person who kidnaps a person under 18 with a sexual motivation will face an upgraded sentence of 25 to life, rather than the current sentence of 3 to 11 years. Likewise, this bill offers additional protections to those who are developmentally disabled. Any person who recruits or otherwise compels a person with a developmental disability to engage in sexual activity or involuntary servitude will face a much harsher sentence of 25 to life, rather than the current 15 to life.

This bill also targets those who facilitate trafficking by recruiting or transporting victims. The current standard requires that facilitators of trafficking "know" that they are recruiting for the purpose of human trafficking. In practice, human traffickers often purposefully leave their facilitators in the dark about their activities so as to protect themselves and to give the facilitators culpable deniability. By changing the "knowing" standard to a "reckless' standard, those who facilitate human trafficking need only have "reason to believe" their victims will be trafficked. This lower standard recognizes that those who facilitate human trafficking are just as culpable as the traffickers themselves and makes it easier to bring them to justice.

Human trafficking is among the most reprehensible and destructive crimes that an offender can commit in Ohio. Victims of human trafficking face psychological damage that is so significant that escaping their exploitation can be impossible. Trafficking destroys individuals, families, and communities alike. Those who facilitate this heinous crime deserve no sympathy and will receive none if the Human Trafficking Prevention Act becomes law. Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and

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members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on

HB 47. I welcome any questions you may have.