



Before the Criminal Justice Committee

Testimony
Of
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Director, Human Trafficking and Social Justice Institute

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Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for providing us the opportunity to testify to you on a matter that will support the state's efforts to combat human trafficking. My name is Dr. Celia Williamson and I am the Director of the Human Trafficking and Social Justice Institute (Institute's) at the University of Toledo. The Institute's mission is to respond to human trafficking and social justice through teaching, research, and engagement. I'm submitting this testimony to support H.B. 56, permitting the expungement of an individual's criminal record if caused by human trafficking. I write this testimony to stress the importance of removing this barrier to assist victims of human trafficking entering the workforce.

I have focused my efforts on the issue of human trafficking for over 20 years, almost a decade as a provider of direct services to victims. I am the founder of the first anti-trafficking direct service program in the state, and have been a researcher for the past 17 years at the University of Toledo, conducting 9 studies on human trafficking, editing 2 books, and have written numerous articles. I also founded the Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition, am a member of the Alliance of Human Trafficking Coalitions in Ohio, and serve as Chair of the Ohio Attorney General's Research and Analysis Subcommittee of the Human Trafficking Commission.

I would like you to support this legislation for three main reasons:

- 1) Manipulation, coercion, force, fraud or a combination of these are used to make victims of human trafficking sell themselves and/or commit crimes for the benefit of their trafficker. These crimes would not have been committed had it not been for the force, fraud, or coercion of a trafficker. People who are victims of human trafficking don't have the free choice to do or live their lives as they want.
- 2) As you know, having a criminal record provides employers with reasons to deny employment. H.B. No. 56 aims to help adult victims who have been rescued have a fair chance to obtain and work a livable wage job through legitimate means and to obtain economic stability. Former victims who can be employed in livable wage jobs are able to pay taxes, buy homes, and live free to pursue their American Dream.
- 3) The nation calls on us to rescue and restore victims. Rescue is largely left to the criminal justice system. Restoration involves psychological recovery from the trauma endured. It also involves mental, emotional, and physical movement from victim to survivor and to thriver. Thriver involves the opportunity to become the person they would have been had they not been trafficked. Not allowing the opportunity for victims who were forced or manipulated into committing crimes to obtain livable wage employment because of their record, is the impetus that relegates them to the permanent underclass of society. Victims should not carry a record that blocks them from obtaining and maintaining a livable wage job. Without this opportunity, full reintegration into society is not possible. It is vital to their recovery that they get the opportunity to fully recover. A part of that recovery is the ability to obtain a livable wage job.



Throughout my career, I have seen firsthand and witnessed countless stories not only about the trauma, but the recovery of victims of human trafficking. Victims receive services such as trauma treatment, substance abuse treatment, counseling, and life skills in order to develop a path toward self-sufficiency. On their journey to economic stability, one of the many barriers victims face are the collateral consequences of prior prostitution-related convictions or convictions of crimes they were forced to commit, which directs their path to dependence and possibly even returning to the trafficker. Without viable employment, individuals face additional barriers such as the ability to obtain safe and affordable housing and benefits to meet basic needs.

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee, let us lengthen the path of victims of human trafficking from rescue to recovery to restoration. To be effective we need to help move *victims* to *survivors* to *thrivers*. Everyone deserves a second chance. Removing all of the chains, including convictions that are not the fault of an individual lied to, tricked, or forced to commit crimes will impact thousands in Ohio and empower them to change their lives. You have the power to change lives for the better. You will be helping individuals begin and stay on the course toward productive citizenship, leading to a better way of living that survivors choose and have the free choice to make. I, including the people who work with victims every day, ask for your careful consideration of this legislation and to give these individuals an opportunity to be restored and thrive in doing so.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Celia Williamson, A.P.

