



**Proponent testimony submitted to the
Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee
House Bill 427
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Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and Members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 427, which would create an expanded definition of “compel” in both O.R.C. 2907.21 and 2905.32, to include controlled substances and manipulation of controlled substance addictions. In doing so, this bill allows prosecutors to consider these factors when pursuing legal action against offenders who use substances and addiction as a means to facilitate human trafficking. As Ohio’s statewide coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

As this committee is well aware, human trafficking is a form of modern slavery and it involves force, deception, or coercion to exploit victims for financial or personal gain¹. This industry generates billions of dollars in profit each year for offenders, and often involves victims who face immense barriers to coming forward; while we typically focus on language barriers, fear of the perpetrator, and fear of law enforcement in discussing these barriers, we must also recognize that many victims are unable to come forward due to the coercive or forced influence of substance abuse.

The connection between human trafficking and compelled substance use is self-evident. Multiple research studies confirm that substance use, abuse, and addiction are quite common in sex trafficking situations². A recent survey of survivors of human trafficking reports that 84% of survivors used drugs during their exploitation, and more than a quarter (27.9%) said that forced substance use was a part of their trafficking experience³. Further, victims report that they have been provided drugs to encourage addiction, and that drugs have been withheld by offenders to coerce them into engaging in sexual activity⁴.

Substance use and abuse can both precede a victim’s entry into a sex trafficking situation, and develop throughout the course of a victim’s experience. In other words, some survivors may be coerced to engage in sexual activity to pay for drugs; others may consume drugs to cope with the ongoing violence and trauma in their situation. Substances are effectively used as tools to facilitate

¹ Polaris Project, National Survivor Survey, https://polarisproject.org/?gclid=CjwKCAjwzOqKBhAWEiwArQGwaKIknLB5MEGOFEnGkmgmrWbCXU2FrvITnAl3WLff5DzPCuw_Scc6RoC1kiQAvD_BwE.

² Lederer, L. & Wetzel, C. (2014). The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities. *Annals of Health Law* 23, 61- 91.

³ Raphael, J. and Feifer, R. (2017). What We Know About Sex Trafficking, Prostitution, and Sexual Exploitation in the U.S. World Without Exploitation. https://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/Research-Summary_What-we-know-about-trafficking-prostitution-and-exploitation-in-US-.pdf

⁴ Raphael, J. & Ashley, J. (2008). Domestic Sex Trafficking of Chicago Women and Girls. A Report from the Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center, DePaul University College of Law, and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

recurring sexual assaults and other forms of violence. Substance use can result in impaired judgment, dulled physical pain and ultimately addiction, which are means by which offenders use to seize and trap victims in a vicious cycle that often ties them to the trafficker indefinitely.

By allowing persecutors to consider the role that substances can play in coercing and compelling trafficking victims, we will close the loophole that allows offenders to weaponize substances, particularly opioids, and allow for increased accountability for traffickers.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 427. I am available to answer any questions you have or provide any additional information via email at rbeltre@oaesv.org.