

Chairman LaRe and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 427. My name is Jean-Philippe Rigaud and I am an agent assigned to the Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force.

In my individual conversations with the many I have served since being assigned in 2016 to the Task Force, the issues surrounding drug use and addiction remains one of the most distressing. In spite of the extensive physical, mental, and spiritual abuse shared in the experiences of those I've been privileged to serve, one of the most consistent difficulties I hear from them is their impairment from drugs. They are addicted and they know it. Helplessness is often heard throughout their narratives. But many share a story not stemming from a personal history of drug abuse. Rather, as they find themselves trapped in being a commercial sex 'object,' I have heard it shared often how the initial use and following dependence on drugs was a factor introduced by the trafficker.

A term I only came to know of in my task force assignment – “dope sick” – is repeated in almost one hundred percent of my encounters with the individuals I serve. Predominately women, those who have come to trust and share their lives with me in these brief sessions resound the same mantra – they can't leave their pimp, controller, boyfriend, aunt, or whatever name they call their sex trafficker. Almost every one of these women sharing their experiences with me have unfortunately been driven to sell their bodies in return for the controlled substance or the next hit!

I believe House Bill 427 can greatly assist these individuals suffering due to their pimp-induced addiction. But I also know House Bill 427 can provide agencies such as mine the necessary language to better investigate and prosecute an underlying element used by today's traffickers-controlled substance addiction. Thank you again for considering my testimony.