

Senate Judiciary Committee

Senate Bill 183—Proponent Testimony

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

Thank you Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on senate bill 183, The Expanding Human Trafficking Justice Act. We at Peace-Work find this legislation to be consistent with our scientific study of the most effective programs to address human trafficking in Ohio.

Peace-Work is an NGO, an all-volunteer collaborative of statisticians, data scientists, and other researchers performing pro bono statistical analyses in issue-driven advocacy, including poverty, homeless, education, etc. Scientific research on human trafficking is a major initiative at Peace-Work.

As the lead author of this research, I would like to provide a summary of its findings and their relevance to The Expanding Human Trafficking Justice Act. A scientific study by Peace-Work published in 2017 applied public health methodology to identify risk factors for human trafficking such as poverty and housing insecurity, among others. Unexpected drivers of human trafficking included a correlation with per capita income: states with higher median incomes tended to have more confirmed cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Call Center maintained by Polaris. This is explained by recalling that trafficking is an economic activity requiring both poor victims and affluent perpetrators; areas with high levels of both reported more human trafficking.

This research supports the estimation of the number of human trafficking cases to be expected in a given geography. Subsequent research completed in 2019 compared the actual number of cases reported to the expected number; states with a higher number of reported cases than expected are more effective at supporting victims and identifying perpetrators. The practices followed by such states, not found in states with weaker reporting performance, allow identification of the most effective legislation and government practices to combat human trafficking. For example, Ohio and Michigan have similar demographics, socio-economic conditions, and economic bases. However, Ohio – which has adopted a few more of the anti-human practices recommended and tracked by Polaris – has a correspondingly higher reporting rate than Michigan. This analysis supports direct assessment of the most effective practices under different conditions, providing specific recommendations for each state as the best next step in fighting human trafficking.

By this data-driven assessment, the state of Ohio's performance in supporting victims and identifying perpetrators is above average and improving. Most best practices have already been adopted. In terms of priorities for legislation and government programs, this analysis recommends (1) strengthening Safe Harbor laws and expungement, (2) implementing more training programs to enable first responders, medical care workers, and teachers to recognize the key signs of human trafficking, (3) expand interstate cooperation along the I-75 corridor. The model of cross-border cooperation developed by the anti-human trafficking organization End Slavery Cincinnati should be pursued on the border with Michigan.

The top priority recommended in this scientific study includes the action implemented by senate bill 183. Participation in criminal activity and fear of arrest is a critical factor in keeping victims trapped.

Expungement reduces the barriers to reporting and escape from human trafficking. As an application of data-driven policy making, senate bill 183 is exemplary. Analysis indicates this bill will increase identification of victims and perpetrators and support survivors in a highly effective manner. Without financial cost and serving the interests of justice, this bill will provide a key piece of the puzzle needed by survivors as they rebuild their lives.

At this time, we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.