

PROPONENT TESTIMONY
SB 183, The Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
Barbara Freeman
October 5, 2021

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 183.

My name is Barbara Freeman. I am a Thriver and a Survivor of human trafficking. I have been out of the life now for 12 years and 5 months and I work four jobs. Today I am a Doctor's Assistant, Peer Recovery Supporter, and Supervisor at Nationwide Children's Hospital, full time. I am an Engagement Specialist at the YWCA, full time. I am also the Founder and the Director of the Freeman House and the Freeman Project which both are nonprofit organizations that provide street and community ministry as well as housing to Survivors of human trafficking, addiction, domestic violence, and homelessness. I am a motivational speaker, training community leaders on how to better spot and respond to human trafficking and motivating young people in schools and colleges.

Senate Bill 183 is extremely important to me. This law would make the freedom of expungement available to all human trafficking Survivors. That is extremely important to me because my expungement gave me the ability to walk through so many doors. It helped me find meaningful employment and a life that I always dreamed about but that I never through I could touch. The law that we have for expungement gave me room to prove myself to society. It helped me to work toward my goals because I knew I had something to look forward to and achieve. It gave me a chance, because at a very young age my chance at a normal life was taken from me. I was not given an option or a choice. I was coerced and trapped in a lifestyle that almost killed me. It did not leave me with the option to live a decent life.

My expungement gave me the opportunity to start all over again and make a better life for me and my children. I had soliciting cases on my record but I also had theft cases, drug cases, parole violations, things like that. It was all related to my trafficking and victimization, the people who exploited me were always there, always in my ear. They had me doing things that they would never do to make them money. It is not always just soliciting or things like that.

It is not fair that other Survivors, including some of the ladies that I serve in the community, do not have a chance to get an expungement because they do not have those kinds of cases on their record. When you are trafficked, it is not all the time that you are you in the street where you will be arrested. Sometimes they keep you in a house. Sometimes, depending on your background, you don't end up in jail because the traffickers know that there might be more consequences for them. If your family looks like they might do something or like they might pursue consequences if you get arrested, they keep you in the house, under wraps. It is unfair that those who have not been put through the system on the street cannot request an expungement even though they have experienced human trafficking.

I know that it feels like a hard question, how do we know that they have gone through something like that, that they're really a victim? But you'll know. I had to go through programs, a two-and-a-half-year program at Amethyst, the CATCH Court program with Judge Paul Herbert, I had to keep re-living that part of my story over and over again. You cannot lie about a situation of human trafficking and convince the court that it is accurate. I worked on my expungement application for almost a year so I could get my record expunged. I had to prove every single case that I had to the court. I had to shed some tears and re-live some truly terrible situations that I had been through. My expungement application dug up some things that were really hard on me but I had to do it because I had to prove myself to the court, I had to prove to them that I deserved my expungement.

Because of my expungement I can go anywhere I want. I can do anything I want. I work all these amazing jobs and now I am applying for college. I walk with my head held up high with a confidence I did not have before. I asked the courts to forgive me, I was being enslaved and coerced at the time of my record. I asked the court to give me a chance to show you who I really am, and I still work on that every single every day. I do the right thing even when no one is looking. I am so grateful to be where I am today. I want that for everyone who has been through human trafficking. We can be productive members of society if you give us this opportunity.

If you pass this law, it will finally give all Survivors the right to be free. This was the last thing for me. The final piece. I no longer have to be judged by my past. It gives us the right to be free because even though we are out here living right and sober, as long as we have that record hanging over our heads like a cloud we are not free. I no longer have to explain everything in my past to an employer or to a landlord before even sitting down for the interview. If we apply for

jobs or an apartment that record is thrown in our faces and then we have to explain what happened to us to a total stranger. Today no one is looking at me, judging me, because they know what is in my past. I am no longer labeled by what happened to me and what people made me do. Today I can choose when and if I share that part of me with someone on my own terms. That is freedom.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you about my story and about what I would like for all Survivors. I think that expungement is so important, and it changed my life in so many incredible ways. I want this freedom for everyone who had to experience human trafficking and I hope you pass this law to open the door for them, too.

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