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Testimony in Support of SB 183
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Megan O'Dell, and I am an attorney at the Ohio Poverty Law Center. The Ohio Poverty Law Center advocates for evidence-based policies that protect and expand the rights of low-income Ohioans. We are a non-profit law firm working closely with Ohio's legal aid community, serving Ohioans who are living, working, and raising their families in poverty. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 183, the Expanding Human Trafficking Justice Act.

According to the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Attorney General's Office, human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal industries in the world.¹ Human trafficking is the illegal use of vulnerable people to make a profit through sex work or labor, and Ohio ranks among the 10 worst states in the nation for human trafficking.² Many trafficked victims face violence and abuse and are forced to commit criminal activity such as theft, prostitution, or drug trafficking by their trafficker. Although more resources are necessary, courts are sometimes able to spot warning signs and assist survivors with substance abuse treatment, housing, and employment.

For survivors of human trafficking who are lucky enough to make it out, criminal expungement is a useful tool to erase their criminal record that was created as a result of being a victim of human trafficking. Survivors with expunged records no longer have the burden of explaining their criminal record to potential landlords or employers, for example, which can quickly re-traumatize them.

Although this is a very useful tool for many, human trafficking expungement is restricted to only those with soliciting, loitering, and prostitution convictions.³ This excludes survivors of labor trafficking and sex trafficking who were never convicted of these offenses. For example, it is common for sex trafficking survivors to have convictions for theft, drug possession, and drug paraphernalia on their criminal record. If the survivor does not have a soliciting, loitering, or prostitution conviction, they cannot apply to have these other offenses expunged. Not allowing these individuals to apply for record expungement means they are restricted from employment opportunities and occupational licensing due

¹ <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/sexual-assault-and-domestic-violence-prevention-program/human-trafficking>

² <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/sexual-assault-and-domestic-violence-prevention-program/human-trafficking>

³ ORC 2953.38(B)

to their criminal record. These criminal records can also create barriers to finding safe and affordable housing. This keeps survivors of human trafficking vulnerable with fewer opportunities for success and safety. For these reasons, I urge you to support SB 183.