

**PROPONENT TESTIMONY**  
**SB 183, The Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**Teonna Wells**  
**September 21, 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 Teonna. I am a survivor of human trafficking. I have been out of that lifestyle for over six years and today I am a mother, a full-time nursing student, a wife, an active participant in my recovery community and a small business owner.

Senate Bill 183 is essential and a game changer to and for me. This law would make expungement accessible to survivors like me. That is important to me because my story falls under the umbrella of not qualifying for expungement under the current law, because I have never been convicted of soliciting. I know firsthand what it feels like to not have your story heard and acknowledged.

Maya Angelou once said, “there is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you”. Because my story is not of a girl who lived in a community where police knew to patrol for trafficking, or of a girl that got picked up on the street and caught, my story is currently left out. My story is of a girl who lived in a nice suburb that met a man who she thought was nice too, a man that promised her a better life then she was running from. A man that used her vulnerabilities against her. A man that made her his prey. A man that used abuse of all kinds; physical, emotional, mental, sexual and spiritual to break her down. A man that had her so deep in the trafficking and drug life that for years there was no hope for escape. A man that told her death was the only way she would be free. That girl I have described is more than just me, but many of us that need this change within the law to truly feel and be free.

I do not qualify for expungement under the current human trafficking law and the effects of this have been detrimental. Every avenue of my life has been affected because of it. I have had

so many amazing job offers that ended with a “we cannot hire you because of your background”. I have not been able to do an internship that is dear to my heart because of my background, and I have also had to do an alternative method to make it through nursing school thus far. It is so tragic that for years I have not only fought for but also sought for a better life for myself and my children, just for door after door to be slammed in my face. The way the current law stands my voice doesn’t matter and because my voice doesn’t matter neither does my story. As I am typing this it brings me to tears to know where I came from and how far I have truly come means nothing in the eyes of the law.

Passing a bill as crucial as this will ensure that not only doors can be opened for me but windows and rooms too. Passing this bill will open so many possibilities for the direction of my future that have been severely limited these past six years. Often the limitations experienced in my life today make me feel like I am still stuck in my past. I have limits on where I can work, who I can be around, and where I can go. When I was finally rescued from that lifestyle, the taste of Freedom is something I cannot ever give full justice by just describing. I was set free in one aspect of my life, yet I am still chained in this area. I truly believe the most important impact of passing this bill will help ensure that not only me, but women who fall under the same category as me, the women who do not qualify under the current law can shift our lives internally and externally from women simply just surviving to women that are thriving.

Thank you very much for taking the time to hear my voice and allowing me the opportunity to share my story with you. It was much needed reminder that my voice and story matter too

*Teonna Wells* \_\_\_\_\_

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