

Written Testimony of Dr. Celia Williamson

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Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

RE: Testimony in Favor of S.B. 183

I am honored to submit testimony in favor of Senate Bill 183. I feel uniquely qualified to provide a knowledgeable critique of the bill. I have been engaged in human trafficking focused research and anti-trafficking focused work in Ohio since 1993. Specifically, I have conducted federally funded research on the topic of human trafficking for the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Justice from 2002-2012, and since have been funded by national and local foundations to study the issue in Ohio. I worked to lay the ground work on human trafficking policy and programming in Ohio and developed the first direct service program in Ohio to serve victims in 1993. I am a Distinguished full Professor of Social Work in the School of Social Justice at the University of Toledo where I serve as Executive Director of the Human Trafficking and Social Justice Institute. I also serve as President of the Global Association of Human Trafficking Scholars and as a managing editor for the Journal of Human Trafficking. I am considered an expert particularly in the area of sex trafficking.

I am in support of Senate Bill 183. Based on my years of research and work in the area I know that failure to have access to an expungement prevents these survivors from getting stable housing, accessing certain social services, and finding gainful employment; all the things an individual needs to rebuild their lives.

Even though most would prefer to understand human trafficking in simple terms, the reality is that it is complex. Traffickers exploit, abuse, force, and manipulate victims in various and numerous ways. Often our caricature of how trafficking works prevents us from understanding the complexities of what really happens and the several ways victims are manipulated and forced to engage in criminal activity, NOT of their own free will.

We are called to "Rescue and Restore" survivors. Restoring survivors means providing pathways for them to obtain gainful employment via a livable wage. It means providing them access to safe and affordable housing. These are fundamental necessities that without the passing of this bill become insurmountable barriers. These barriers lead some back into drug addiction, a coping mechanism used by many that have been suffered chronic and complex trauma. Funding a drug habit often leads victims back into a life they've known all too well. Providing avenues for survivors to be restored is the goal. Opportunities to expand expungements lays the foundation

for victims to rebuilt their lives via access to safe and affordable housing and livable wage employment. If we want to support victim recovery, we will support SB 183.