

**Proponent Testimony for HB 427
Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
Andrew DeFratis, *Director of Public Affairs*
Cleveland Rape Crisis Center
May 17, 2022**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for considering this proponent testimony on House Bill 427 on behalf of the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center (CRCC).

My name is Andrew DeFratis, Director of Public Affairs with Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. As one of the largest rape crisis centers in the country, our mission is to support all survivors of rape and sexual abuse, promote healing and prevention, and advocate for social change. Our vision is the elimination of sexual violence.

As you've heard, House Bill 427 would expand the definition of compelling someone into human trafficking – including sex trafficking – to include instances where it can be proven that the perpetrator overcame the victim's will through use of a controlled substance or manipulation of a victim's addiction to a controlled substance.

Human trafficking is the second-largest criminal industry in the world, with more than \$30 billion generated by the movement and trade of human beings. Ohio has ranked as high as fifth in the nation among all states in total reported human trafficking cases.

Since our agency was founded in 1974, even before we had the term "human trafficking," survivors of sex trafficking have trusted us with their stories and healing journeys. We have seen through the COVID-19 pandemic that far too many women, children, and men in our communities remain vulnerable to this modern form of slavery.

To meet the changing needs of survivors, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center opened our Human Trafficking Drop-In Center in the Glenville Neighborhood of Cleveland in 2021 to provide convenient access to comprehensive services for survivors, including individual counseling, case management, assistance for survivors considering legal options or navigating the criminal justice process, support groups, a legal clinic, and additional specialized programming. The Drop-In Center has allowed us to offer a safe space for survivors to access help, no matter how long ago they were hurt.

Through our survivors, we know that traffickers often prey on vulnerable individual who are not addicted, and groom them into trying and becoming addicted to drugs – for the purpose of manipulating that addiction. Traffickers will also target people with substance use disorders, using the promise of unlimited drugs to keep their victims under control.

Traffickers will often loan drugs to trafficked individuals, with the stipulation: once you meet your sex quota, you can pay me back. Survivors have frequently shared stories of traffickers withholding drugs until they meet a sex quota, or otherwise using drugs as a reward.

I can share with you the experience of one of our survivors: a seventeen-year-old girl whose self-esteem and confidence were broken. She was looking to build a bond with someone she could trust. She didn't know she was being trafficked. But "under the spell" of her trafficker, she began snorting cocaine, believing they were doing so together – though he was not actually partaking. She believed "if she was with him, she was safe." It wasn't long before that trafficker sold her to another trafficker.

While not all survivors feel comfortable discussing their addiction with us, in instances where a trafficked individual described to us drug use as part of their experience being trafficked, we estimate sixty percent of those instances involved drug use-manipulation by the trafficker.

Trafficking can occur anywhere: in any suburb, any town, within any city. Teenagers are especially vulnerable. Cleveland Rape Crisis Center believes that HB 427 would acknowledge the role substance abuse plays in trafficking manipulation, and make prosecuting the traffickers easier.

I appreciate this opportunity and strongly encourage your support. I would be happy to accept questions by email at andrewd@clevelandrcc.org.