

CENTRAL OHIO HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE OHIO ORGANIZED CRIME COMMISSION



Proponent Testimony Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee

Senate Bill 13 (Sponsor: Senator Fedor)

Submitted by: Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force Agent Aaron Dennis

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Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and distinguished members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of Senate Bill 13.

My name is Aaron Dennis and I work as an investigator with the Ohio Attorney General's Office Organized Crime Human Trafficking Task Force. I have been on the front lines combatting human trafficking crimes for eleven years now. During this time I have investigated hundreds of cases and have assisted/interviewed an overwhelming number of victims. This experience has provided me with a unique perspective on this issue.

What I have learned is children in Ohio (specifically 16 and 17 years of age) are being targeted/recruited by pimps and sex traffickers because it is a low-risk lucrative business. Lucrative because one victim can earn a pimp/trafficker thousands of dollars in a week through exploitation in commercial sex. Low-risk because this crime is not a primary focus for law enforcement and our state Human Trafficking law regarding minors is substandard. By not properly addressing these issues we are inviting pimps/traffickers to operate in Ohio.

Senate Bill 13 would align Ohio with federal law and 49 other states where compulsion is not required when a minor is exploited through a human trafficking scheme. This is important because since 2012, approximately ninety-percent (90%) of the sex trafficking cases involving minors (investigated by the task force) the victims were 16 or 17 years of age. In my opinion this is not a statistical anomaly, but evidence this demographic is being targeted because of their age, vulnerabilities and lack of legal protection. Ohio law enforcement is at a particular disadvantage when trying to investigate human trafficking cases involving 16/17 year old victims because our current law is woefully inadequate and outdated.

Senate Bill 13 will not create new offenders but will hold criminals already engaging in human trafficking crimes fully accountable. Multiple times over the past several years I have filed lesser included state felonies on pimps/traffickers due to the gaps in Ohio's Trafficking in Persons law. One of the most difficult things I have done in my career is explain to a child victim why their

trafficker only received a few months in jail as the sentence for their horrible crime. We have the power to prevent this injustice from occurring again by allowing Senate Bill 13 to become law.

Human Trafficking cases are very complex often taking months or even years to complete. The investigations frequently involve multiple suspects, multiple crimes and are progressed using advanced law enforcement techniques. These investigations focus solely on the facilitators who overtly recruit and exploit their victims for monetary gain. It would be erroneous to think an individual would be charged in a human trafficking investigation by simply engaging in consensual sex. Through all the investigations involving minor victims I have worked the past eleven years, consent was never an issue. Reason is, the victims are always manipulated, coerced or lured into an exploitive situation. Often with minor victims this occurs without compulsion due to their young age, lack of knowledge, unexpressed fear and trauma. The passage of Senate Bill 13 would not alter the current concept of consensual sex and would enhance investigators abilities to properly charge pimps/traffickers for their criminal actions.

In closing, I want to again thank Chairman Eklund and other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for allowing my written proponent testimony to be placed into record. I truly appreciate your time and urge your support for this important bill.

I would also like to thank Senator Teresa Fedor and her co-sponsors for presenting this bill. Your dedication to the issue of Human Trafficking over the years has led to the passage of legislation that provides Ohio law enforcement with more tools to combat this horrible crime.

Respectfully,

Detective Aaron Dennis
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