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**Senate Judiciary Committee  
Dave Yost, Ohio Attorney General  
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Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee—thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today on SB 247, legislation that will greatly aid in my office’s efforts to combat the scourge of human trafficking.

Ohio has the fourth-highest rate of sex trafficking reports in the United States. According to Shared Hope International’s 2019 Report Card, Ohio scored lower than any of our surrounding states and in the bottom third of states nationally based on laws to end sex trafficking. We can - and we must - do better.

Any business, whether legitimate or unlawful, requires two things to operate: supply and demand. SB 247 takes aim at both of these factors.

From the supply side, the bill gives law enforcement an important tool to tie traffickers to the sexual activity for hire that occurs at their behest, but often outside their presence.

Creating an offense for knowingly receiving the proceeds from prostitution will allow law enforcement to charge and arrest pimps and traffickers without re-traumatizing victims who are often fearful of testifying. This new charge would operate much like the current receiving stolen property charge. While I may not be able to prove that you came into my home and stole my television, if I can prove that you possessed my television, I can bring a charge for receiving stolen property.

Even as we make progress targeting and disrupting trafficking rings in Ohio, if we cannot address the overwhelming demand to purchase sex, new bad actors will continue to rush in to meet this demand and profit from it. That is why this bill is also designed to drive down demand.

The current soliciting for prostitution charge addresses both the seller and the buyer of sex and charges them with the same crime. However, these two individuals require two very different responses. SB 247 would split the statute into separate sections and create a new charge to address only the buyer of sex. This new engaging in prostitution charge would come with escalated penalties, and require offenders to attend an educational program referred to as ‘john school.’ The soliciting statute would maintain the current charge for sellers, as this is important to refer them to needed services.

Currently, most convicted ‘johns’ are ordered to pay a fine, and after doing so they return home to their unsuspecting families. Would they commit this crime if they thought their mother might find out?

SB 247 seeks to bring these individuals out of the shadows and expose their illegal activity by establishing the Sexual Exploitation Database within the office of the Attorney General. This registry will include anyone convicted of or pleading guilty to the new engaging in prostitution charge or promoting prostitution. The database would include the photo, name, and address of the offender as well as the type and location of the offense. Much of this information already gets published in media outlets after arrests. However, this legislation will help expand this practice by requiring clerks of courts statewide to forward this information to the attorney general’s office for posting. Offenders who do not reoffend will automatically be removed from the registry after five years, and the legislation includes language that would allow for an earlier removal due to an expungement or an overturned conviction.

No one accidentally buys sex from a prostitute. This activity is not the romanticized interaction between consenting adults as portrayed by Hollywood. The difference between prostitution and human trafficking is simple: two verses three.

In human trafficking, the client walks home to their families, and the traffickers walk away with the profit. The victims are often women and underage girls who are coerced and abused by a third party. As a society, we must not walk away from these victims—we must run towards them. SB 247 would help us to do that by shining a spotlight on buyers, and slapping handcuffs on abusers.

I commend Senators Schaffer and Fedor for their leadership on these issues. Thank you again Chairman, and members of the committee. I would be happy to take your questions at this time.