

**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 385
House Criminal Justice Committee
Kirsti Mouncey, President and CEO
Collaborative to End Human Trafficking
May 7, 2024**

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 385.

My name is Kirsti Mouncey and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking (Collaborative). In fulfillment of our vision to eradicate human trafficking, we serve as the backbone organization of Greater Cleveland's Coordinated Response, which serves as Cuyahoga County's anti-human trafficking coalition. Our Legal and Legislative committee contributed to this testimony, which consists of community advocates, survivors with lived experience, and attorneys with extensive expertise in the field.

Freedom is a fundamental human right. It is a cornerstone of what makes us human. Yet, across the world and in our own communities, this right has been stripped from far too many as they are forced, tricked, and coerced into situations over which they have no control.

The legislature has supported numerous efforts aimed at eliminating human trafficking and we thank you for this work. We write in support of House Bill 385, which will provide victims and survivors an expanded pathway to expungement of their criminal records for crimes they committed while under the control of another person, often as means of survival.

A criminal record is very common for trafficking victims, and it stands as a major roadblock to their recovery and ability to seek gainful employment, stable housing, and more. We know that escaping a trafficker is just the start of a victim's path to recovery. The Collaborative and members of the Coordinated Response work with survivors to provide mental health counseling, housing assistance, and a number of other services to help them lead a healthy, fulfilling life. Nevertheless, prior convictions prevent survivors from rebuilding a better life and remain a constant reminder of their abuse. At every job interview, they must explain the circumstances of their victimization, which re-traumatizes them and makes potential employers uncomfortable. Expanded opportunities for expungement are needed so that survivors can move past their victimization toward a brighter future.

We know that survivors face extreme hardships, and that this legislation will help them rebuild their lives and regain control. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the legislation and urge this committee to move the legislation expeditiously. We are happy to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.