

**Interested Party Testimony submitted to the  
Senate Finance Committee  
Kirsti Mouncey, President and CEO, The Collaborative to End Human Trafficking  
May 30, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Kirsti Mouncey and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking (Collaborative). The Collaborative leads Greater Cleveland's Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking, a multi-disciplinary group working together to develop a comprehensive and coordinated response to human trafficking in Northeast Ohio.

Started in 2007, the Collaborative is a 70-member strong nonprofit that includes mental health facilities, the county offices of the Sheriff and Prosecutor, tourism organizations like Destination Cleveland, our robust hospital system, and many municipalities and their police, fire, and EMS divisions. We provide specialized core training and technical assistance to equip organizations and individuals with the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to address human trafficking through increasing public awareness, delivering tailored trainings, and facilitating multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Human trafficking is a prevalent, yet often unrecognized and underreported issue in Northeast Ohio. Those at highest risk of being sex or labor trafficked are the most vulnerable children in our country. The average age at which youth are being lured into such exploitive situations is approximately 13.

When we think of human trafficking- we think of rescuing a person from a horrific situation in which they were held captive. We think they are free now; they are good to live their life. The truth is far from it: a person spends an average of 10 years in the life of trafficking in which they make their trafficker hundreds of thousands in profit to the detriment of their mental and physical health, education, and contributions to society – PTSD, trauma, the inability to parent children, addiction and sometimes early death are just the tip of the iceberg of consequences. To add to that are the vulnerabilities someone experiences prior to being trafficked – the vulnerabilities traffickers' prey on – youth in the foster care system, kids kicked out of their home (it takes an average of 48 hours for a homeless kid to be picked up by a trafficker), sexually abused and neglected children. This trauma costs taxpayers \$458 billion- which equates to more than \$3,300 per person in the US annually.

When a trafficking victim finally exits the life of trafficking, it takes them another 10 years before they are "restored" to a life that resembles that of a non-trafficked person. The resources needed for that "restoration" are vast and extensive. No organization or system alone can provide these services, and it requires a trauma informed coordinated response to nit a "restoration plan" together.

The conduit to these coordinated efforts are anti-human trafficking coalitions, such as the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking in Cuyahoga County, and the newly formed Lorain County Collaborative. We build trauma response efforts in our community by fostering relationships and trust between providers to create innovative solutions. Our goal is to ultimately find ways to prevent this from happening in the first place.

Ohio has been focused on the issue of eradicating human trafficking in recent years and both the Governor and the Attorney General's office have active Human Trafficking Task Forces. In fact, I sit on the AG's Human Trafficking Task Force. The legislature has supported numerous efforts aimed at

reducing human trafficking and we thank you for your support. However, there is much more work to do. At an event in March, Ohio Attorney General acknowledged that "We are not going to arrest our way out of this human trafficking problem." I believe more must be done preventatively to protect our youth from being trafficked in the first place.

While coalitions like ours and others exist to focus on a community response to human trafficking, there is very little funding available to support this work. Our colleagues next door in Lorain County have no dedicated funding to support their work. We are seeking your support to formalize an enhanced trauma response network for trafficked and at-risk youth in Cuyahoga and Lorain Counties.

**We are requesting \$300,000 each fiscal year through the Attorney General's office to help fund this collaboration.**

We know from our work that victims and their traffickers are not restricted by county borders. Working together will enable both coalitions to establish the infrastructure needed to offer immediate trauma informed placement services to trafficked and vulnerable youth. This partnership will allow more seamless sharing of data and foster a collaborative approach to preventing this crime. I ask for your support of this request. Thank you for the opportunity to testify; I would be happy to take any questions.