



BILL NO: House Bill 1202
TITLE: Human Trafficking Victims – Establishment of Diversionary Docket and Workgroup
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 28, 2017
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Amara Legal Center strongly supports the passage of House Bill 1202. The Amara Legal Center is a nonprofit legal services organization which provides free legal services to survivors of sex trafficking in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. House Bill 1202 would require circuit administrative judges to establish a diversionary docket for minor victims of human trafficking. The bill would also establish the Workgroup to Study Single-Point Entry for Services and Criminal Immunity for Victims of Human Trafficking. The Amara Legal Center supports HB 1202 because an effective protective response system will better meet the needs of minor victims of human trafficking in Maryland.

A significant number of human trafficking victims are children under the age of 18. In Maryland, 66 of the 158 trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2016 were cases involving minors.¹ In its final report, Maryland’s Workgroup to Study Safe Harbor Policy for Youth Victims of Human Trafficking identified a statewide need to better connect minor victims of human trafficking with appropriate services to meet their unique needs.² Through our work with survivors of human trafficking, the Amara Legal Center recognizes the challenges faced by young survivors and the need for a great deal of specialized support to help them heal from the trauma they’ve experienced. To prevent re-traumatizing minor trafficking victims and best support their long-term recovery, minor victims should be diverted from the traditional juvenile justice system and connected to a specialized, multiagency response network for comprehensive care as soon as possible.

In Maryland, minor trafficking victims can face criminalization for acts committed as a result of their victimization. This experience in the traditional juvenile justice system unjustly re-traumatizes and stigmatizes victims and risks undermining their long-term recovery. House Bill 1202 would address this problem by requiring the creation of special dockets to divert minor trafficking victims charged with prostitution and other non-violent misdemeanors related to their victimization from the traditional juvenile justice system and providing them with an immediate connection to appropriate services. Adopting HB 1202, Maryland would join at least 25 other states that have already adopted a statutory mechanism for diverting minors into a protective response system³

¹ National Human Trafficking Hotline, *Hotline Statistics: Maryland*, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/maryland> (last updated Dec. 31, 2016).

² Maryland Safe Harbor Workgroup, *2016 Final Report* (Dec. 1, 2016), available at <https://goccp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/safe-harbor-workgroup-final-report-2016.pdf>.

³ Shared Hope International, *JuST Response State System Mapping Report: A Review of Current Statures, Systems, and Services Responses to Juvenile Sex Trafficking* 76-77 (2015), available at



Additionally, the Workgroup to Study Safe Harbor Policy for Youth Victims of Human Trafficking recommended the formation of a new workgroup to further study and design a plan for a single point of entry to services for all minors who are victims of human trafficking.⁴ Juvenile detention facilities and other traditional child service agencies often lack the resources and training to provide survivors with a safe environment and appropriate, trauma-informed services to meet their unique needs. Fragmented services across multiple agencies and care providers can also frustrate victims and hinder their ability to access all of the support mechanisms available to them. House Bill 1202 would officially establish the recommended Workgroup to Study Single-Point Entry for Services and Criminal Immunity for Human Trafficking, enabling the development of a comprehensive, multiagency response system designed to help victims rebuild their lives after the trauma of exploitation.

Minor survivors of human trafficking deserve a just and comprehensive response to their unique needs. By adopting HB 1202, Maryland can take a major step forward in protecting minor trafficking survivors from re-victimization and supporting their recovery. For these reasons, the Amara Legal Center supports HB 1202. We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stacie Reimer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stacie" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Reimer".

Stacie Reimer
Executive Director
Amara Legal Center

<http://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/JuST-Response-Mapping-Report-Final-web.pdf>.

⁴ Maryland Safe Harbor Workgroup, *supra* note 2.