



BILL NO: House Bill 632
TITLE: Child Abuse – Sex Trafficking (Protecting Victims of Sex Trafficking Act of 2017)
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 23, 2017
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Amara Legal Center strongly supports the passage of House Bill 632. 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 632 would alter the definition of “sexual abuse” in Maryland’s provisions of law relating to child abuse to include the sex trafficking of a child. The Amara Legal Center supports this bill because it will help protect minors who have been exploited for the purpose of commercial sex.

A significant number of sex 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 order to identify minors who are victims of sex trafficking and appropriately meet their needs, it is important that state child protection statutes facilitate reporting of suspected cases of sex trafficking as child abuse and fully empower law enforcement officials and child protective agencies to respond to those reports and intervene on behalf of victims.²

The statutory alterations proposed in HB 632 would broaden the definition of sexual abuse in the Child Abuse and Neglect subtitle of the Code of Maryland to include sex trafficking of a child, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a parent or caregiver. The Child Abuse and Neglect subtitle provides for the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse, investigation of reported abuse, and intervention by local departments of child protective services on behalf of children who may have been the subject of abuse. Adopting HB 632 will ensure that child sex trafficking victims are afforded the same protections as victims of other forms of child abuse. In particular, the changes will permit law enforcement officials and child welfare agencies to better investigate reports of child trafficking and provide vital social services to child sex trafficking victims, including those exploited by individuals other than a family member or caregiver.

Like other forms of child abuse, the trauma of sex trafficking can have serious and long-lasting negative impacts on victims. The express inclusion of sex trafficking in the definition of sexual abuse in Maryland’s statutory provisions relating to child abuse and neglect will enhance the state’s ability to identify and protect children who have been victims of sex trafficking and

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

² See Shared Hope International, *Protected Innocence Challenge: A Legal Framework of Protection for the Nation’s Children* 102-06 (2015), available at <http://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/PIC2015REPORT2.pdf>.



minimize the negative impacts of trafficking on their lives. For these reasons, the Amara Legal Center supports HB 632. We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacie Reimer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stacie Reimer
Executive Director
Amara Legal Center