



BILL NO: Senate Bill 1016
TITLE: Labor and Employment – Regulation of Farm Labor Contractors and Foreign Labor Contractors
COMMITTEE: Finance
HEARING DATE: March 16, 2017
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Amara Legal Center strongly supports the passage of Senate Bill 1016. The Amara Legal Center is a nonprofit legal services organization that provides free legal services to survivors of sex trafficking in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Senate Bill 1016 would establish licensing and disclosure requirements to regulate foreign labor contractors operating within the state and authorize foreign workers to bring civil actions against contractors who violate those regulations. The Amara Legal Center supports this bill because labor trafficking victims, especially women and girls, are also vulnerable to sexual exploitation and stronger regulation of foreign labor contractors will help protect foreign workers in Maryland from all forms of human trafficking.

Foreign workers entering the United States on temporary visas have become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation by foreign labor contractors. Foreign labor contractors can misuse nonimmigrant visa programs by making false promises to lure foreign workers into the country, deceiving workers about the terms and conditions of their employment, and charging high “recruitment” fees. Once the foreign workers arrive in the United States, contractors or their trafficking affiliates use debt bondage, violence, threats, and other coercive tactics to trap workers in abusive and exploitative working conditions.

Nearly one quarter of the human trafficking cases in Maryland reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline between 2012 and 2016 involved labor trafficking.¹ Maryland currently has statutory provisions to regulate farm labor contractors but labor trafficking is not limited to the agriculture industry. The domestic service, construction, restaurant, and hotel industries are also common venues for forced labor of foreign workers.

Senate Bill 1016 would broaden Title 7 of Maryland’s Labor and Employment Article, regulating farm labor contractors, to offer statutory protection to foreign workers outside of the agriculture industry. Under SB 1016, all foreign labor contractors would have to register with and receive a license from the Commissioner of Labor and Industry and keep records of foreign workers’ contracts and wages. Foreign labor contractors would be required to provide full and fair information about the terms and conditions of the work prior to employment and prohibited from charging foreign workers any fees related to their services. Additionally, SB 1016 would empower foreign workers to take civil action against contractors who violate the statute’s regulatory provisions.

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



The registration and regulation of foreign labor contractors will help combat human trafficking in Maryland by increasing transparency and preventing the fraudulent and coercive practices that lead to the exploitation of foreign workers. For these reasons, the Amara Legal Center supports SB 1016. We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacie Reimer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Stacie Reimer
Executive Director
Amara Legal Center