



BILL NO: Senate Bill 1018
TITLE: Human Trafficking Victims – Establishment of Workgroup
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: March 9, 2017
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Amara Legal Center strongly supports the passage of Senate Bill 1018. 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. Senate Bill 1018 would establish the Workgroup to Study Single-Point Entry for Services and Criminal Immunity for Victims of Human Trafficking. The Amara Legal Center supports this bill because developing and implementing 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 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-traumatization and support long-term recovery, minor trafficking victims should be connected to a specialized, multiagency response network for comprehensive care as soon as possible.

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 To address this need the Safe Harbor Workgroup recommended the formation of a new workgroup to design and implement a plan for a single point of entry to services for all minor victims of human trafficking in the state.³ 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. Senate Bill 1018 would officially establish the recommended workgroup, fostering the development of a comprehensive, multiagency response system specifically designed to help victims rebuild their lives after the trauma of exploitation.

Additionally, 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

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 *Id.*



recovery. Under SB 1018, the new workgroup would be tasked with exploring solutions to this problem by studying the possibility of providing immunity in connection with participation in services to minor victims of human trafficking who have been charged with criminal offenses or delinquent acts.

Minor survivors of human trafficking deserve a just and comprehensive response to their unique needs. By establishing the Workgroup to Study Single-Point Entry for Services and Criminal Immunity for Victims of Human Trafficking, Maryland can continue to take steps to protect minor trafficking survivors from re-victimization and support their recovery. For these reasons, the Amara Legal Center supports SB 1018. 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