



BILL NO: Senate Bill 222
TITLE: Courts – Human Trafficking – Civil Actions – Statute of Limitations
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: January 31, 2017
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Amara Legal Center strongly supports the passage of Senate Bill 222. 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 222 would extend the statute of limitations for several tort claims arising out of human rights violations from three to ten years. The Amara Legal Center supports this bill because the current limitations period is simply too short to allow survivors of human rights abuses who seek to file civil claims against their abusers to have their day in court.

Through our work with survivors of human trafficking, the Amara Legal Center recognizes the distinct and varied challenges these survivors of human rights abuses face in their attempts to rebuild their lives. Following their escape from a trafficking situation, survivors commonly find themselves living in poverty, unable to secure safe housing or gainful employment because of the collateral consequences of a criminal record related to their trafficking experience. Many others find themselves requiring time and a great deal of support to heal from the trauma they've experienced.

When they are finally ready to consider bringing a civil claim against their trafficker, finding a lawyer to represent them and gathering the proper evidence to support such a claim is also particularly time-consuming. These challenges, combined with a categorical time-bar of only three short years, mean that so many of these human rights claims simply never make it to court.

Maryland has supported similar efforts in the past by extending the statute of limitations for civil claims relating to other egregious abuses. In 2003, the statute of limitations was extended for civil actions arising out of childhood sexual abuse to seven years after the survivor attains the age of majority. Notably, the legislation was passed nearly unanimously, with only one opposing vote in the House. Passage of SB 222 would ensure perpetrators of human rights abuse do not find safe harbor in Maryland and affirm the state's legacy of leadership in defending human rights.

We support this legislation in recognition of the unique and varied barriers that survivors of human trafficking face as they work to rebuild their lives. The extent of the trauma incurred by survivors, coupled with the additional legal hurdles they face, should be recognized and reflected in the time available to access justice and seek civil remedy in Maryland. For these reasons, the Amara Legal Center supports SB 222. We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,



AMARA LEGAL CENTER



Stacie Reimer
Executive Director
Amara Legal Center