



BILL NO: House Bill 270

TITLE: Business Regulation - Innkeepers - Maintenance of Guest Records and Employee Human Trafficking Awareness Training and Policy

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters

HEARING DATE: February 2, 2022

SUBMITTED BY: Caroline Ackerman, Managing Attorney of Maryland Legal Services & Special Projects, Amara Legal Center

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Amara Legal Center writes to support House Bill 270 (HB270). We are grateful that Delegates Ebersole, Palakovich Carr, Patterson, and Ruth introduced this important legislation to address human trafficking in lodging establishments. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our thoughts.

The Amara Legal Center (“Amara”) provides free legal services in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia to survivors of sex trafficking and to anyone whose rights are violated while involved in commercial sex. Since 2013, Amara has served over 500 clients with more than 800 legal matters. Although many believe that sex trafficking only occurs overseas or among foreign nationals, the vast majority of Amara’s clients are U.S. citizens, both juveniles and adults born and raised in the D.C. metro area. Amara provides brief legal advice, partial and full representation for civil legal issues such as civil protection orders, divorce, child custody and support, and name changes. In addition to civil legal services, Amara provides victim-witness advocacy for clients working with law enforcement, criminal/juvenile defense, and representation in criminal record sealing and expungement cases.

With the proliferation of online advertisements and the perceived anonymity at many lodging establishments, hotels and motels are among the most common venues for human trafficking and they can be an integral partner in efforts to stop it. HB270 requires all employees of lodging establishments to receive an annual training on human trafficking. This training will enable staff to understand the indicators of trafficking and to identify survivors. Many survivors live in hotels and are coerced to engage in commercial sex in hotels. Hotel staff may not identify them as survivors, may not know what services are available to help survivors, or may even be willfully ignorant of the trafficking because of the financial profit to the hotel itself. In addition to training, the bill requires lodging establishments to develop protocols for staff to report trafficking and to respond to individuals who may be trafficked. Importantly, the bill requires that the protocol include connecting the survivor to available resources. These requirements are essential steps in addressing trafficking in a more coordinated approach in the hospitality industry and meeting survivors’ needs.

In addition, the bill addresses lodging establishments that may financially benefit from trafficking by requiring enhanced record-keeping of all customer transactions in a computerized system with records being retained for at least six months. This measure will not only discourage lodging establishments from turning a blind eye to trafficking, but will also enable law enforcement to collect critical information necessary for trafficking-related investigations.

For the aforementioned reasons, Amara supports HB270. We respectfully urge a favorable report.