



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Senator William C. Smith, Chairman
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Testimony **IN SUPPORT** of SB 768: Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

I commend Senators Lee and Watson for their leadership on this critical legislation which will protect child victims of sex trafficking from further harm and criminal prosecution.

Currently, all children are considered victims of human trafficking if they engage in any form of commercial sex. In addition, this outdated law still allows that same child to be charged in the criminal or juvenile justice system today for acts that are directly related to their victimization including prostitution and other related offenses.

In 2020, Howard County received a \$1.1 million federal grant in partnership with HopeWorks, Howard County's only domestic violence and sexual assault resource center. Since then, our Administration has worked to provide better services to survivors of human trafficking. This legislation builds on the work of the Human Trafficking Vacatur Act of 2020, which removes some of the criminal offenses that served as barriers to obtaining housing, employment, and becoming self-sufficient. Howard County has a robust Human Trafficking Prevention Coordinating Council, comprised of community stakeholders including our State's Attorney, Director of Social Services, Executive Director of Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center, Howard County General Hospital staff, and advocates dedicated to eradicating human trafficking in our community.

Senate Bill 768 is appropriately precise: it will give child sex trafficking victims safe harbor from criminal or delinquent charges for committing crimes from a defined list as a direct result of their trafficking. This bill will protect victims of sex trafficking from unjust criminalization. This necessary safe harbor for child victims is an important step forward for Maryland by preventing further victimization and fully embracing the national best practice of connecting child trafficking victims to critical services.

We view all victims of trafficking, especially children, with a victim-centered lens and are focused on expanding our child sex trafficking regional navigator program with more partnerships and accurate education to potential reporters. This legislation is an important step forward in codifying this basic improvement to our protections for child sex trafficking victims statewide. I welcome your partnership on this critical bill and urge a favorable report on SB 768.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive