

BILL NO: Senate Bill 206
TITLE: Criminal Procedure - Motion to Vacate Judgment - Human Trafficking (True Freedom Act of 2020)
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: January 29, 2020
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

Testimony of Mrs. Donna Bruce, Maryland Resident and Human Trafficking Survivor:

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman, Madam Vice-Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Donna Bruce and I am here in support of Senate Bill 206. I am currently a Family Mentor with the Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services where I work to help families with drug-exposed babies. I am also a mother, a wife, a daughter, a long time Maryland resident, and a sex trafficking survivor.

Expanding the vacatur law to include crimes other than prostitution would greatly help people like myself move beyond the control of our traffickers by allowing us the opportunity to clear our criminal records of convictions for acts we were forced to commit by our traffickers.

I was trafficked by numerous people; people I trusted, including my biological mother. My traffickers used various techniques to control me such as being verbally, sexually and physically abusive, promising me a better life, love or a romantic relationship, or withholding basic needs such as clothing, food and shelter.

While all of my traffickers forced me to engage in sex for money, I only have one prostitution conviction on my record. I do, however, have numerous other convictions on my record for crimes *other than* prostitution that my traffickers forced me to commit. For instance, my traffickers forced me to use drugs, which led to convictions for drug possession.

They forced me to steal for them or risk be kicked out onto the streets without any food, money or anywhere else to go, leading to several convictions for theft.

My traffickers forced me to turn tricks in abandoned buildings resulting in convictions for 4th degree burglary.

They forced me to lie to police officers in order to cover up their criminal enterprises or risk being stabbed. I have the scars to prove it.

My traffickers also physically abused me, and sometimes I would try and fight back, resulting in me being charged with battery and other related charges.

Though I've made significant changes in my life, including becoming a licensed beautician and getting clean from all drug use, I still have to deal with my past convictions from when I was trafficked. For example, one day when I was teaching a class at a beauty school I was working at, one of my students did a case search of me and exposed my criminal background to the entire class. I felt defeated and incredibly embarrassed. Additionally, my husband and I are currently trying to become foster parents to help kids not have to go down the same road I had to. But, when the foster care agencies see my criminal record, I am forced to relive the horrible experiences that led to these convictions in an attempt to have them not disqualify me from becoming a foster parent. It's retraumatizing, and it's just not fair.

I have come very far in my life, but my criminal record still hinders me from being as successful as I would like to be. Clearing my record will give me the confidence to help others escape trafficking and become successful productive citizens.

Traffickers do not limit their control to prostitution, and it is time that Maryland's vacatur law recognizes this. Thank you.