



January 28, 2020

House Bill 242 - Motion to Vacate Judgment—Human Trafficking

**The “True Freedom” Act of 2020
Committee: Judiciary
Hearing Date: January 28, 2020
Position: SUPPORT**

WISE is a woman’s advocacy group born out of the 2017 Women’s March. WISE stands for Women Indivisible Strong and Effective. We provide a platform for women of diverse views to come together and promote values and rights that foster inclusivity, fairness, and safety in our communities. We vow to turn our collective energy into action and advocate indivisibly on a range of issues, particularly at the local level.

We are entering our third year as an organization and, as such, have established legislative priorities. Our Women’s Issues Huddles has adopted HB 242 and we are in full support of this bill.

Victims of human trafficking, a significant portion of whom are female-identified, are commonly forced to engage in criminal acts by their traffickers. Survivors who are criminalized for acts they were forced to commit by their trafficker often experience difficulties obtaining safe housing and gainful employment, which keeps them trapped in poverty and vulnerable to continued exploitation. Although Maryland law already allows survivors of sex trafficking to vacate, or, set aside prostitution convictions stemming from their trafficking experience, these survivors are commonly forced to commit a range of crimes other than prostitution. Under Maryland’s current vacatur law, these convictions are ineligible for relief. Because Maryland’s current law only allows for vacatur of prostitution convictions, the number of survivors able to access this form of legal relief is low, while the need for a more comprehensive form of relief remains high. The singular focus on prostitution convictions also means that criminalized survivors of labor trafficking are completely ineligible for relief. Survivors who are unable to access this form of relief continue to experience stigma as well as difficulties reintegrating back into society following their victimization.

Please support these vulnerable women so they may have a true chance at a successful life; indeed that they may have True Freedom.

Sincerely,

Sharon Blugis, MS
WISE Steering Committee
Women’s Issues Huddle Facilitator