



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 11, 2020

HB459: Criminal Law - Victims of Human Trafficking - Affirmative Defense

POSITION: SUPPORT

Senators Cain, Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and the rest of the Judiciary Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of HB459: Criminal Law - Victims of Human Trafficking - Affirmative Defense.

This legislation will establish an affirmative defense to certain crimes if a defendant committed an act as a result of being a victim of an act of another in violation of certain State and federal provisions of law prohibiting human trafficking; prohibiting a defendant from asserting the affirmative defense established by the Act unless the defendant provides a certain notice to the State's Attorney at least 10 days prior to trial; etc.

In 2014 alone, nearly 400 victims of human trafficking were discovered in the state of Maryland, people who would have been helped by this piece of legislation. Governor Hogan has established the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force, with the goal of aiding victims and reducing the impact that human trafficking has on Maryland Residents.

The ability for survivors of human trafficking to adequately defend themselves from accusations that come as a direct result of their presence in the human trafficking rings is critical. Maryland's central location and transportation infrastructure makes this state a prime hotspot for human trafficking, resulting in increased risk to members of our community.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, with a population of over 1.6 million persons.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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