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Parent * Eastern Shore Human Trafficking Task Force * Prevention Project Ambassador

Testimony in Support of

HB 575 : Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program (Human and Sex Trafficking)

Sponsor: Delegate Steven Johnson

Ways and Means Committee, 1 p.m. February 13, 2020

Honorable Chairwoman Anne Kaiser, Vice-Chair Alonzo Washington and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak before you today in support of House Bill 575.

It is absolutely critical that we take the necessary steps to educate our youth about human and sex trafficking.....the 2nd largest, fastest growing criminal enterprise in the US.

Life has a way of giving us opportunities to be lifelong learners.....giving us knowledge about things we may have known little or even nothing about. Knowledge is defined as “facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education”. As you heard Kevin share, we gained knowledge through a very personal experience with a topic most find hard to talk about, acknowledge, or even fear on some level. But, we all have a choice on what we do with the knowledge we acquire. We have found it our calling to take our knowledge, particularly on the topic of the lures and tactics of a predator(a key component in child sex trafficking), and bring awareness and education to our community about it in an effort to prevent another child and family from being targeted and preyed upon.....and quite honestly, we are way behind getting out in front of this.

Since the fall of 2019, in Wicomico County Schools alone.....we have had 5 cases of adults in positions of trust and protection of our youth (a guidance counselor, an instructional assistant, a teacher, and 2 administrators) violate that very trust and either exploit them directly or stand by in silence in protection of the predator.....and its sickening to me.....and our kids need protected.

Education about all aspects of human and sex trafficking will arm these students with the knowledge and tools needed to stand against becoming a victim, a buyer, or a trafficker and engage them as advocates in the fight against this evil.

Matt Ployd, a government teacher at Smithfield High School, said that as he went through material provided by the Prevention Project (a youth focused Human and Sex Trafficking Program) with his students, they quickly understood the importance of the subject.....and that every single youth is at risk.”

Ployd said his students decided to work on ways to spread awareness about human trafficking or curb its impact.

One of them, Joel Hatfield, then a senior at Smithfield, went above and beyond. He developed a computer program that can unmask traffickers and their clients who use the” dark net” where their real identities, their credit card numbers and other information that would otherwise remain anonymous. Ployd said he sent the program to the county’s information technology staff for examination to make sure Hatfield’s claim was accurate.

“They immediately called me back and said, “This program has no business in the hands of anybody but the military and law enforcement,”Ployd said.

I implore each of you to support **HB575** and equip and empower our youth in combatting an issue that is plaguing their generation.