

## HB575 Testimony

Good Afternoon, my name is Riya Patel, I am an 18 year old student at Harford Community College. I am speaking on behalf of students who have gone through the Maryland school system, oblivious of a terrifying threat on their lives. 369, the number of human trafficking survivors that came in contact in Maryland. 381, were victims of sex trafficking. 364, were girls and women. All but 8 were U.S. citizens. 56% were 17 or younger. Human trafficking is the third-largest international crime industry. It reportedly generates a profit of approximately \$150 billion every year. The heartbreaking truth is that it is happening all around us without us even realizing it. According to the United Nations, human trafficking is defined not only as the recruitment and transportation of individuals, but also exploitation in regards to forced labor and prostitution. About 700,000 people are trafficked every year. This is about 58,000 every month, 1,900 every day, 80 every hour, and about 2 every single minute.

I could spew more numbers and statistics but the real way to understand this is to learn about the life of McKenzie, a human trafficking victim right here in Maryland. As reported by the Baltimore Sun, McKenzie was a fellow student majoring in criminal justice when a hamstring injury resulted in the loss of her scholarship. Desperate for money, she invested herself in a man who promised to

take care of her. She trusted him. But McKenzie soon found herself under his brutal control, forced to work as a prostitute. When she refused, he beat her, stomping her into unconsciousness with his steel-toed boot, breaking a blood vessel in her right eye. She couldn't run. If she tried he would put a gun in her mouth and threatened her and her family. 18 months later, the FBI arrested McKenzie. She was charged as a prostitute when she actually was a human trafficking victim — his victim.

Somehow this horrific brutality which was inflicted on McKenzie is not an isolated case. We are talking about 14 - 15 - 16 year olds who are being sexually assaulted, raped up 20 times a day. As an 18 year old girl from Maryland, I can assure you that my peers and I are never taught how to handle such a situation. Our lives are constantly, unknowingly in danger. HB575 is crucial to ensuring the safety of myself, my friends and all of my peers, to prevent ourselves from becoming another McKenzie. Please support this bill so that I know, so that we know how to protect ourselves and amplify the voices that often go unheard. Thank you.