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## **HB- 575**

### **Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking Hearing: February 13, 2020 - 1pm**

#### **FAVORABLE**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington and the Ways and Means Committee, I am a community social justice advocate, attorney and member a various state and national bar associations and former Chair of the NAACP Maryland State Conference Political Action Committee, and I in my personal capacity as "The Healthy Lawyer" ask for a favorable report on HB-575.

Having grown up in South Central Los Angeles in a crack infested neighborhood where sexual abuse and violence was a norm, and police helicopters flew overhead like birds fly into a tree, I can say from experience that education about human trafficking for 6 and 8 year old children is long over-due. Regretfully, I was 8 years old when I suffered my first sexual abuse by a caregiver director at the local community center where my mother had to leave me beyond the normal day care hours because she had to work two jobs. While it is extremely sad that any community in this county would have to educate children so young about the signs and tricks of Human Trafficking, I wish someone could have educated me when I was 8 years old and abused. My case of abuse happened over 20 years ago, which underscores the importance of this bill now! At 8 years old, I did whatever that caregiver told me because my mother who suffered from mental illness did not have time to educate me. It was only by the grace of God that the man was finally removed for the center after the parents of another child who was abused (and who had two parents and time to investigate the situation) reported the man. I too could have been a statistic of human trafficking.

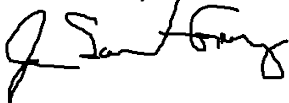
While all children are precious in the sight of the Lord and laws must be passed to protect them, it is important to note that according to the book "Black Women's Blueprint", 60% of black girls experience sexual assault by the time they reach 18 years of age. Below are more important facts that stress the importance for passing HB-575:

- Maryland has ranked in the top 20 states with the most human trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline;
- In 2018, 38% of those cases involved minors;
- Human Trafficking is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest and fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world;
- Reported age of entry is between 11-14 years of age (Our children are being targeted by traffickers);
- Between June 2013 and October 2019, over 610 reports of suspected child sex trafficking were reported and screened by Child Protective Services units in Maryland's 24 local Department of Social Services; and
- Edward Wyckoff Williams, writing for VICE, asserts the emotional and psychological toll on abuse victims makes it difficult for them to come forward.

While the scars of abuse never go away and it has been through the process of giving back and advocating for others that I have become "The Healthy Lawyer," HBC 575 must be passed so that other 8 year children are not ignorant of abuse like I was. The health of our children, both mind, body and spirit, must be protected and correct education that empowers children to speak up and not be afraid to seek help is critical to combating Human Trafficking.

May God continue to protect those in children in darkness about sexual abuse and bring them to the light of freedom from all abuse!!!

Sincerely,



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