



BILL NUMBER: House Bill 130

TITLE: Commission on LGBTQ Affairs – Established

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations

HEARING DATE: January 14, 2021

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF) and its members respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 130, as it will help combat discrimination and marginalization of Maryland’s LGBTQ citizens, therefore reducing vulnerability to victimization for this community, including human trafficking.

HB 130 creates a Commission on LGBTQ Affairs within the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives, tasked with assessing challenges faced by these communities, establishing best practices, collecting data on both discrimination and the implementation of LGBTQ-friendly policies, and working to pass laws inclusive of individuals identifying as LGBTQ.

MDHTTF supports efforts to dismantle human trafficking by strengthening laws to prosecute traffickers, providing services and rehabilitation to victims, and increasing awareness of the issue. Additionally, the task force seeks to prevent trafficking through reducing vulnerability to trafficking among underserved or marginalized communities. LGBTQ individuals, particularly youth, are at disproportionate risk for discrimination and homelessness, two factors that increase a person’s risk to exploitation and trafficking.¹ It is important to note that a person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity do not inherently make them more vulnerable to human trafficking. However, the homophobia and transphobia that LGBTQ people face at individual and systemic levels cause disparities in access to housing, employment, medical care, which can leave them more vulnerable to traffickers. According to the Polaris Project, a nationwide anti-trafficking organization, LGBTQ youth are “overrepresented among runaway and homeless youth populations, as they experience more frequent harassment, family rejection, violence and economic instability. LGBTQ youth often report challenges in locating and accessing services....Where basic needs of LGBTQ youth go unmet, young people may enter high-risk, poorly regulated employment sectors or provide commercial sex acts in exchange for basic necessities.”²

There is a risk not only that these communities will be mis-served, but also that individuals identifying as LGBTQ will not come forward for help out of fear and distrust. Discrimination and prejudice are a very real barrier in the fight against human trafficking and the Commission

¹ *Breaking Barriers: Improving Services for LGBTQ Trafficking Victims*, Polaris Project, 2015.

² *Id.*

on LGBTQ Affairs created by HB 130 is a critically important step in the state's journey of inclusiveness and anti-discrimination efforts as well as anti-trafficking initiatives.

About MDHTTF: Formed in 2007 by the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Attorney General of Maryland, and the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, MDHTTF serves as the lead investigative, prosecutorial, and victim services coordinating body for anti-human trafficking activity in the State of Maryland. MDHTTF has grown to include most law enforcement agencies in the State, all child-serving state agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, Homeland Security Investigations, most local State's Attorney's Offices, and dozens of victim service agencies. MDHTTF is comprised of five committees – legislative, law enforcement, victim services, public awareness, and training. During this time, MDHTTF has grown a robust understanding of the issue of human trafficking in Maryland.

For further questions, please contact the co-chairs of the Legislative Committee of MDHTTF, Amanda Rodriguez at arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org or Anne Wallerstedt at azwallerstedt@gmail.com.