

Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I write to you on the behalf of students and adolescents in the State of Maryland who are not equipped with the proper education to prevent themselves from becoming targets of human trafficking. While outlawed, it is an underground, hidden crime industry that is continuously growing worldwide without the knowledge of law enforcement and the government, let alone the general public. I went through the Maryland school system and I would never have learned about human trafficking and its impact within our state without personal research. So, I ask a question: How do you expect individuals to prevent themselves from falling victim to a crime they do not even know exists? If students are old enough to be trafficked, they are old enough to learn about what human trafficking is, how to identify the signs, and how to go about protecting themselves if in such a situation. My peers and I have never been taught or heard of human trafficking in the Maryland school system. Yet, Maryland ranks as the fourth largest hotspot for trafficking in the country. Prevention education not only protects potential victims but also prevents the development of potential buyers. The human trafficking industry is a supply and demand industry. If children are taught that buying labor and sex, knowingly or even unknowingly, could be part of a human trafficking ring, then they will think twice about it in the future. If the demand goes down, then the need for a supply will decrease as well. Additionally, social media and dating apps are often used to find victims. The younger generations are increasingly the most active on social media, which makes them the easiest targets. While it is important, human trafficking cannot be eliminated by simply making it illegal. It is critical to change the mindsets of individuals who might grow up thinking this is okay. Teaching children about human trafficking can save lives, and can make our State and our communities safer. This is why I ask for your support on HB138, on the behalf of the students in the Maryland school system.

Thank you,

Riya Patel

Ph: 443-371-1135 / Em: rpatel19@owlmail.harford.edu