

February 1, 2021

The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairwoman Kaiser,

HB 138 - Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking - Favorable

I support requiring the State Board of Education and nonpublic schools to develop and implement a program of education on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault. Our children need to know how to protect themselves and against human and sex trafficking. HB 138 will help meet this need, particularly since educators will be educated on the signs of human and sex trafficking, which will help them identify potential child victims. It has been reported that the average age for being assaulted and/or trafficked continues to decline; therefore, it is appropriate to make materials available for students in grades 6 through 8 to promote the awareness and prevention of sex abuse and human trafficking.

Combating human trafficking and sex exploitation begins with awareness and prevention. Having materials available in a **safe environment** such as a school, is extremely important. Think of adult victims who are provided with materials in public bathrooms or in public health care facilities where they can be made aware of sex abuse and human trafficking. As a previous Child Protective Services worker, I recall that **the majority of abuse and neglect cases were reported by school officials**. Having children be aware of what is happening to them and be able to identify a safe adult to talk to about this issue is extremely important. Informing students in grades 6 - 8 will help prevent them from becoming victims and equip them to make others aware of the dangers associated with human trafficking including labor trafficking. There are reports of arrests, convictions and sentencing of predators in the local press. It will be best if through education we prevent such crimes and not need to treat the victims and perpetrators.

For the above reasons, I vote a favorable report for HB 138. I do request that a date be included in 7-439 (c) for the adoption of the regulations.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Maloney, LCSW-C