



BILL NO: House Bill 833/Senate Bill 768
TITLE: Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex
Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response
COMMITTEE: Judiciary/Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: February 17, 2022/March 8, 2022
POSITION: SUPPORT

TurnAround Inc. respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 833/Senate Bill 768. This bill extends protections available to child sex trafficking victims first established by the Child Sex Trafficking Screening and Services Act of 2019. TurnAround, Inc. supports and advocates for survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual violence and human trafficking. It has been an authoritative voice in the field for more than four decades.

HB833 protects child victims of sex trafficking from criminal charges for prostitution and other related crimes related to their victimization. This bill has significant implications for many child victims of sex trafficking.

Maryland ranks behind forty-two other states, plus the District of Columbia, in their legal response to child sex trafficking.¹ In fact, Maryland received a grade of F from Shared Hope International in their 2021 annual review of the effectiveness of state victim protection laws and ranked among the 10 worst states for the treatment of child victims.²

In the last fiscal year, TurnAround worked with approximately 40 child victims of trafficking. National statistics collected by Polaris identifies 15 as the average age of initial trafficking. In 2020 41% were trafficked by a family member or caregiver. In 45% of the trafficking cases, the victim was recruited by a family member and 10% by a friend. More than half of these victims have been in the child welfare system. These statistics leave child sex trafficking victims particularly vulnerable. Currently, child sex trafficking victims are vulnerable to criminal charges for acts related to their victimization. They can be charged with:

- Prostitution and related crimes.
- Status offenses like truancy and running away.
- Street survival crimes, like trespassing, 4th degree burglary, and drug possession.³

Child sex trafficking victims are forced or manipulated to commit such acts by their traffickers. They endure significant and complex trauma as a result of the dangerous dynamic of power and control at play. HB833 is vital to protect the victims of sex trafficking from prosecution for acts that stem from their own victimization.

For all the reasons stated above, TurnAround, Inc. supports HB833/SB768 and respectfully encourages a favorable report.

¹ Shared Hope International, *Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking: 2021 Toolkit* 40-43 (2021), <https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021Toolkit.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ Shared Hope International, *Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking: Analysis Report Maryland* 6-7 (2021), <https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-State-Analysis-MD.pdf>.