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Bill: HB0833
Title: Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response
Date: February 15, 2022
Committee: Judiciary Committee
Position: Favorable

To the Esteemed Members of the Committee:

I write today in support of House Bill 833 on behalf of FreeState Justice and trafficked or sexually exploited LGBTQ youth in Maryland. I also write today to personally support this legislation as a survivor of child commercial sexual exploitation and survival sex.

FreeState Justice is a Maryland lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) legal services and advocacy organization. Each year, we provide free legal services hundreds of low-income LGBTQ Marylanders who could not otherwise be able to afford an attorney. This includes clients with experiences of being trafficked or sexually exploited, including criminal charges related to trafficking and prostitution that occurred during their youth. We work to support LGBTQ victims & survivors of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation (CES). These improvements to the Child Sex Trafficking Screening and Services Act are critical to ensure all victims are supported and provided an exit ramp from human trafficking and CES.

Research has shown that the stereotype of child sex trafficking victims as young cisgender girls kidnapped into sexual exploitation has led to a disconnect between services and numerous victims. Victims include cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary youth, with boys and trans youth having limited awareness and visibility on this issue. Boys specifically are more likely to engage in survival sex and other criminal or delinquent behaviors while be trafficked or exploited but are less likely to be controlled by a third-party exploiter. Grooming and entrapment look different for boys and members of the LGBTQ community, including an additional layer of being “outed” by traffickers or perpetrators, or denied access to

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FreeState Justice, Inc. (formerly FreeState Legal Project, Inc., merging with Equality Maryland) is a social justice organization that works through direct legal services, legislative and policy advocacy, and community engagement to enable Marylanders across the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities to be free to live authentically, with safety and dignity, in all communities throughout our state.

gender affirming care. In some cases, traffickers or perpetrators might be the only person in a youth's life that is honoring and affirming their gender identity, highlighting the importance of honoring and affirming all victims and survivors throughout our full range of services for survivors.

Beyond this, regardless of age, survival sex has been closely linked to being more vulnerable to sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. We also know that for many victims, exploitation and trafficking can begin at an early age and continue into young adulthood, highlighting the need for our services and support to expand to include older survivors of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

As a survivor, I can attest to the isolation, loneliness, and fear I experienced as a queer youth engaging in survival sex starting at age 17. This isolation only deepened into my early twenties, when someone who had been exploiting me became increasingly violent in our interactions and began escalating threats, threats of harming me, "outing" me and "ruining my life". My perpetrator convinced me that if I reported him, I too would go to prison. He was not wrong, and it was this fear of being criminalized and going to jail that prevented me from accessing services when I needed them the most. Today, I am dedicated to ensuring that others do not have the same fear in getting help.

For this reason, FreeState Justice urges a favorable report on House Bill 833.

Sincerely,



Jeremy LaMaster (he/they)
Executive Director
FreeState Justice