



## TESTIMONY FOR HB0297

### Criminal Law - Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking - Safe Harbor and Service Response

**Bill Sponsor:** Delegate Bartlett

**Committee:** Judiciary

**Organization Submitting:** Maryland Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Cecilia Plante, co-chair

**Position:** FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0297 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of individuals and grassroots groups with members in every district in the state with well over 30,000 members.

Children who are victims of sex trafficking often do not only have the horror of what has happened to them to contend with – they are often arrested and charged with delinquency or another criminal offence. This bill will require that an officer who detains or arrests a child who that officer suspects is a victim of sex trafficking must notify a regional navigator so that the navigator can release the child to the child's parents or guardian (unless it would put the child at further risk) and notify the local child welfare agency.

If a child has already been charged before it is determined that the child was a victim of sex trafficking, the court or the child's attorney or the state's attorney will stay the proceedings while a determination is made. If the determination shows that the child committed the offense(s) under the duress of sex trafficking, all charges will be dismissed.

This is a much more humane way to treat a child who has already been traumatized.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.