

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project The University of Baltimore School of Law

BILL NO: Senate Bill 832
TITLE: Public Health – Pregnancy – Coercion (Coercive Abuse Against Mothers Prevention Act)
COMMITTEE: Finance
HEARING DATE: March 15, 2023
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Human Trafficking Prevention Project strongly opposes Senate Bill 832, as it is clearly being used to advance a political viewpoint through the pretense of caring for women experiencing one form of reproductive coercion, but disregarding other, more common forms of this behavior. Furthermore, it is an attack on women’s reproductive autonomy executed largely under the guise of improving the protections available to survivors of human trafficking.

The Human Trafficking Prevention Project has assisted hundreds of survivors of human trafficking since its inception in 2015, and reproductive coercion is often a part of the dynamic of power and control being exercised over our clients by their traffickers and/or abusive partners. However, unlike what is being addressed in SB 832, we see reproductive coercion far more often in the form of a victim’s trafficker refusing to wear a condom or forcing his victim to engage in sexual behavior in which she does not want to participate. While we have indeed encountered instances where a trafficking victim was forced to have an abortion, it is far more common for a trafficker to coerce his victim into having a child with him as a false promise to “start a family” with his victim, knowing full well that, in reality, it is often financially *and* legally impossible to get away from someone with whom you share children. Additionally, threats to harm or kidnap the child provide a terrifying new tactic for keeping the victim compliant.

The “Whereas” clauses of this bill, ironically couched in terms of freedom of choice for women (see p. 1, lines 21-26, and p.2, lines 1-9), make it starkly plain this is simply an anti-abortion bill dressed up in the guise of seeking to assist vulnerable women. What’s worse is that it seeks to exploit the trauma of those already facing exploitation to do it.

The Human Trafficking Prevention Project strongly believes that access to safe, legal, self-determined reproductive care that includes abortion is foundational to ending sexual harm, including sex trafficking, and is essential for the health and well-being of all women in Maryland. We therefore urge an unfavorable vote on SB 832.

*For more information, please contact:
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