

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

BILL NO: House Bill 973
TITLE: Health – Abortion – Ultrasound and Waiting Period
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations
HEARING DATE: March 16, 2023
POSITION: **UNFAVORABLE**

House Bill 973 would force numerous delay-inducing burdens and obligations upon pregnant people and abortion providers, none of which has any legitimate medical purpose. **The Human Trafficking Prevention Project strongly opposes House Bill 973** because it will negatively impact survivors of human trafficking and other sexual crimes, for whom access to full reproductive care without unnecessary, politically-motivated delays is an essential part of their healing.

The ability to obtain abortion care without delay is critically important to all pregnant people's reproductive health. Delays create an unnecessary barrier to obtaining medical care, intrude on the patient-provider relationship, and fail to protect the best interests of the patient. For victims of human trafficking, the need for access to comprehensive reproductive services free from politically-motivated delay is even more dire, given that high-risk sexual activity and sexual violence is often so commonly a part of their victimization. Trafficking into any form of labor puts survivors at high risk for sexual assault, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and, for child-bearing survivors, unwanted pregnancy.¹ Survivors who are trafficked for sex are particularly vulnerable to these types of abuses, as many traffickers use rape and other forms of sexual abuse to control their victims.² In one survey of sex trafficking survivors, 7 out of 10 respondents said they had at least one pregnancy while trafficked, while one-fifth of respondents reported five or more pregnancies.³ Due to the power and control dynamics so common in trafficking relationships, a victim may be unable to leave their location a second time to get medical care, or they could be put at greater risk of violence from their trafficker if they try to do so. Additionally, because traffickers often move their victims' locations regularly to evade detection by law enforcement, a delay of any time period may be simply untenable.

HB 973 will interfere with the ability of trafficking survivors to access to the crucial health care they need and the support they deserve as they work to heal from the trauma of their trafficking experience. For these reasons, as well as the reasons supplied by our colleagues in the reproductive health and justice field, **the Human Trafficking Prevention Project strongly opposes House Bill 973** and respectfully urges an unfavorable report.

*For more information, please contact:
Jessica Emerson, LMSW, Esq.
Director, Human Trafficking Prevention Project
(E): jemerson@ubalt.edu*

¹ Freedom Network USA, *Human Trafficking and Reproductive Rights* (Apr. 2015), <https://freedomnetworkusa.org/app/uploads/2016/12/HT-and-Reproductive-Rights.pdf>

² *Id.* See also Heidi Stöckl et. al., Human Trafficking and Violence: Findings from the largest Global Dataset of Trafficking Survivors, *Journal of Migration & Health*, Vol. 4 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2021.100073>; Freedom Network USA, *Human Trafficking and Sexual Assault* (Apr. 2015), <https://freedomnetworkusa.org/app/uploads/2018/10/FNUSA-Human-Trafficking-and-Sexual-Assault-2015.pdf>.

³ Laura J. Lederer & Christopher A. Wetzel, *The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities* (2014), <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/The-Health-Consequences-of-Sex-Trafficking%20-.pdf>.