



COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

240-273-9115
info@hiphopenation.com

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PO Box 1577
Temple Hills, MD
20757

To the members of the Judiciary Proceedings Committee,

I am in full support of SB 0292 -Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking-Safe Harbor and Service Response bill. I am the Senior Pastor of Community of Hope African Methodist Episcopal Church. I am submitting testimony because our membership has been, for years, championing the protection of our young people who have been sexually exploited through trafficking.

For us, this is not a partisan issue, rather it is an issue of morality. We want to be clear that trafficking in any form is present-day slavery. Absent the passage of this bill, the Maryland legislature would by default be suggesting that the predatory acts committed against our children are acceptable. It would be sending a public message that holding our children accountable for crimes committed against their will is more of a priority than holding the predators that preyed upon them accountable. It would continue the promotion of contradictory legislation that says that children cannot give legal consent to sex and yet can be charged as criminals for their own rape and sexual assault. Most importantly, it would promote the silencing of child victims because the voice that they are empowered to use to seek help could at present further their trauma by further propelling them into the justice system. We seek the protection of our youth not their prosecution.

I, along with the members of Community of Hope AME Church, urge you stand by our young people by voting for a favorable committee

report concerning SB 0292. This law currently exists in Maryland for adults, we can do better for our children. Your favorable vote replaces barriers with safe havens for our young people. It replaces punitive practices with restorative support systems. It gives young people new hope that they will be able to be productive members of our society without being haunted by a criminal record they did not willingly earn.

We urge you to clear the way for the passage of SB 0292 without concessions and amendments that will jeopardize full protection of our youth. Thank you for your consideration and support.

Yours In Christ,

Rev Tony Lee

Rev. Tony Lee

Pastor, Community Of Hope AME Church
