



Senate Bill 292- Criminal Law – Persons in a Position of Authority - Sexual Offenses With a Minor
Senate Judiciary Committee – February 14, 2023
Testimony of Adam Rosenberg, Executive Director, LifeBridge Health Center for Hope
Position: **SUPPORT**

Center for Hope supports SB292, which would make sure that a minor may not be criminally prosecuted for prostitution or ancillary crimes that are the direct result of being a victim of sex trafficking; expand the list of crimes that victims of trafficking can seek to vacate; include victims of labor trafficking under protection of regional navigators; make sure DSS is notified that there is a trafficking case and provide that a trafficking victim may not be released to their parents unless it is safe to do so.

Center for Hope, a subsidiary of LifeBridge Health, provides comprehensive trauma-informed crisis intervention and response services to patients and community members who have experienced child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, community/gun violence. Our nationally accredited child advocacy center serves over 1,600 children per year, and operates 24 hours per day, 365 days per year in a multidisciplinary team that responds to children who have been sexually abused or assaulted.

Center for Hope serves as Baltimore City's Regional Human Trafficking Navigator, which operates a multidisciplinary response team that coordinates victims' services for trafficked children and adults up to age 24. Since 2011, our Anti-Human Trafficking & Exploitation Program has assisted numerous trafficking survivors in the Baltimore region. We support SB292's trauma response to trafficking victims.

Trafficking victims are generally coerced to commit other crimes. At Center for Hope, the majority of victims we have encountered have criminal charges related to their trafficking victimization. Victims are routinely coerced by their traffickers to, e.g., transport other victims, hold weapons, possess drugs, or commit additional crimes such as trespassing. This practice allows traffickers to escape criminal responsibility for many illegal activities that benefit them. It also, unfortunately, prevents a victim from obtaining an enhanced quality of life following their victimization by preventing them, from, e.g., enrolling in the armed forces or obtaining education, housing or employment.

SB292 helps decriminalize minor trafficking victims. Under current Maryland law, trafficked minors can still be incarcerated for prostitution and related crimes, including offenses that stem from their victimization, such as truancy and running away, as well as crimes that are common to street survival like trespassing, 4th degree burglary, and drug possession. The bill also helps ensure that victims can later seek to vacate judgements for crimes that were committed as a direct result of their trafficking, and thus help regain healthy, stable lives.

We urge a favorable report on SB292.

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