

Testimony in Favor of SB 0292

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My name is Stacy Amparo and I am an Assistant State's Attorney in Baltimore County. I am requesting a favorable report for Senate Bill 292. This legislation is critical to the child survivors of sex trafficking that I have been working with in the courts since 2015. I've been privileged to stand beside survivors as they deliver victim impact statements to judges and what always stood out are children talking about the moment they were recovered. Too many children have the core memory of being handcuffed by the police and placed in a patrol car. Even if they were not eventually charged, this memory has affected the way these survivors view the justice system.

When children are arrested for the act of prostitution, which they cannot consent to, there is a cascade of effects. I have met children that are reticent to be interviewed by the Department of Social Services workers and law enforcement who arrested them. Even when these children are interviewed they are not forthcoming. In Baltimore County we have learned that rapport building is absolutely the key to children disclosing their abuse at the hands of their traffickers. We cannot build that rapport if children are arrested and later interviewed. The mission needs to be one of recovery from its very inception in order to have these children integrated into services that will guarantee they do not return to their traffickers.

We are very lucky in Maryland to have the Human Trafficking Navigator Program. I have sat in countless multi-disciplinary team meetings with other professionals since the Navigator Program was put into effect. This program ensures that we have the services to place children

in that will address their immediate needs as well as any wrap around services they may need.

Warehousing a child at a juvenile facility does nothing to meet the needs of these survivors and only further harms the child's emotional well-being. Arresting a child for prostitution or other low level crimes that may result from being trafficked serves no other purpose than to punish. I have heard stories from child survivors how they were able to meet and networks with other survivors to further their trafficking when they are released from these child detention facilities because children are released and have no better choice than to go back to the lifestyle.

Since it's inception, the Human Trafficking Navigator program has worked to ensure the children survivors of sex trafficking get the services they need in addition to being able to account for the child's whereabouts when it comes time to prosecute the trafficker. No longer can we use the excuse that we won't know where the child is when it comes time to prosecute the case unless the child is in custody. While I like to think all the jurisdictions in Maryland are handling these cases correctly, this legislation guarantees at the very least children will not be placed in handcuffs for a crime they cannot consent to committing. The time is now to pass this bill and I urge a favorable report.