



## HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair  
House Judiciary Committee  
101 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY OF SUPPORT: HB 297: Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response**

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in support of HB 297—Victims of Child Sex Trafficking—Safe Harbor Service Response (Delegate Bartlett).

Under our law, all children are considered victims of human trafficking if they engage in any form of commercial sex. However, our law still allows that same child to be charged in the criminal or juvenile justice system today for acts that are directly related to their victimization including prostitution and other related offenses. This bill is appropriately precise: it will give child sex trafficking victims safe harbor from criminal or delinquent charges for committing crimes from a defined list as a direct result of their trafficking. This necessary safe harbor for child victims is an important step forward for Maryland in terms of preventing further victimization and embraces the nationally held best practice of connecting child trafficking victims to critical services.

In 2020, Howard County received a \$1.1 million federal grant to support our human trafficking prevention efforts in partnership with law enforcement and direct service providers. Since then, our Administration has worked to provide better services to survivors of human trafficking. Howard County has a robust Human Trafficking Prevention Coordination Council, comprised of community stakeholders including our State’s Attorney, Director of Social Services, Executive Director of Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center, Howard County General Hospital staff, and advocates dedicated to eradicating human trafficking in our community.

Howard County is proud to align itself with the experts leading the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force that you’ll hear from directly on this bill. We are enthusiastic participants in the state’s child sex trafficking regional navigator program – a program that is receiving a steadily increasing stream of referrals. The Howard County Human Trafficking Prevention Coordination Council and my administration’s Office of Human Trafficking Prevention view all victims of trafficking, especially children, with a victim-centered lens – and seek to serve them outside of our criminal justice system. You’ll be taking an important step forward by codifying this basic, overdue improvement to our protections for child sex trafficking victims statewide. We urge a favorable report on HB 297.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball  
Howard County Executive