



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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HB 297

DATE: February 9, 2023

SPONSOR: Delegates Bartlett, et al.

ASSIGNED TO: Judiciary

CONTACT PERSON: Sara Morningstar (Sara.Morningstar@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response

House Bill 297 is a reintroduction of legislation that passed the House in 2022 but failed to advance in the Senate. This “Safe Harbor” bill seeks to protect minors (17 years old and younger) who are victims of sex trafficking by prohibiting police officers from charging the child with a crime associated with being a victim of sex trafficking (e.g., prostitution, truancy, running away, etc.). It would also require that the police contact the regional navigator, the local child welfare services department and/or the child’s parent/guardian (if deemed safe to do so). The bill also prohibits the alleged victim from being detained in a juvenile detention facility. Montgomery County supports this legislation. It is also a legislative priority of the Commission for Women as well as the Maryland Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force, and Montgomery County’s Human Trafficking Task Force.

Maryland was recently ranked as one of the 10 worst states in the country to receive a failing grade in every category listed by the Shared Hope International 2021 report on child and youth sex trafficking. There is a gap in services for vulnerable minors who find themselves victimized due to unsafe familial environments, mental illness, substance use, stigma, and immigration issues. This bill would offer more safeguards to ensure these children are protected and that the right agencies are involved in their care.

Montgomery County supports House Bill 297 and urges that the Committee adopt a favorable report.