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BILL NO: SB292

TITLE: Criminal Law - Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking - Safe Harbor and Service Response

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Dear Mr. Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Maryland State's Attorney Association and the Frederick County Cyber Crimes Task Force, we reiterate the purpose of this bill: child trafficking victims should not be prosecuted for their own victimization.

It is imperative that victims of human trafficking receive the services they need. By passing SB 292, this committee will ensure that minor victims of human trafficking who come into contact with law enforcement, and subsequently DJS, will be referred to the Regional Navigator for services.

Frederick County established the Human Trafficking Response Team in 2018. We have had a Regional Navigator, housed at Heartly House, since 2021. As of January 2023, our Regional Navigator has a current case load of 49 victims/survivors. In 2022 alone, our Regional Navigator served 21 minor victims of human trafficking. Not a single victim was prosecuted. Instead, in many of the cases the adults who were exploiting them were successfully prosecuted. We believe in this process and know that it works.

Human Trafficking is a heinous crime. The Maryland State's Attorney's Association urges this committee to send a message to traffickers that no longer will their minor victims be punished for the crimes the trafficker is forcing them to commit. We believe that this bill will empower survivors and lead to more prosecutions of sex traffickers and those exploiting children in our state. For these reasons, the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association supports the SB292.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joyce King".

Joyce King
MSAA Legislative Committee
Co-Chair MSAA Special Victims Committee
Frederick County State's Attorney Chief Counsel