



## COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

February 7, 2023

The Honorable Luke Clippinger  
Room 101  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21404

RE: Letter in Support of HB297 – Criminal Law – Victims of Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking – Safe Harbor Response

Dear Chairman Clippinger and the Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women (“Commission”), I write to express our strong support of HB297 – Criminal Law – Victims of Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking – Safe Harbor Response (cross-filed with SB292) and to urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill. This bill was introduced in prior legislative sessions, and it is time for our General Assembly to support children impacted by human trafficking.

Our commission represents the interests of women and girls in our County, who constitute more than half of the residents in Montgomery County. Through the urging of the Commission for Women, Montgomery County created the Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force, which later transitioned into the Montgomery County Human Trafficking Prevention Committee through legislation. Human trafficking prevention has been and continues to be a priority for the Commission.

A child victim of sex trafficking has already been victimized by being forced to have sex against their will. Arrest and prosecution further traumatize the victim and make it harder for them to rebuild their lives. The criminal record resulting from being prosecuted can be a barrier to future employment, housing, and other opportunities. In addition, the trauma that comes from incarceration can also hinder positive reintegration back into society.

Maryland must help children that have been exploited for sex recover from their trauma and rebuild their lives – and this bill provides specialized services to do so under the regional navigator program passed in 2019.

Thirty-five states have already enacted Safe Harbor legislation. This bill nearly passed in 2022 but ultimately died on Sine Die in conference committee. It is essential that the bill pass this year and without delay. We owe it to Maryland's children who have been trafficked.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna Rojas".

Donna Rojas  
Chair  
Montgomery County Commission for Women