



BILL NO: House Bill 461
TITLE: Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
HEARING DATE: February 15, 2023
POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF) and its members respectfully request a favorable report with amendments for House Bill 461.

House Bill 461 would require the State Board of Education and certain nonpublic schools to develop and implement a program of age-appropriate education on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault that includes the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking for 6th to 8th grade students. The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force supports this bill because school-based education is a crucial component of preventing human trafficking.

In addition to directly addressing the harms of human trafficking after it has already occurred, the MDHTTF also focuses on supporting systemic advocacy designed to prevent human trafficking before it occurs. In the case of HB 461, the MDHTTF believes that education and awareness is critical for the prevention of human trafficking. The CDC states that “[s]ocial-emotional learning programs for youth promote expectations for mutually respectful, caring, non-violent relationships among young people and work with youth to help them develop social-emotional skills such as empathy, respect, and healthy communication and conflict resolution skills.”¹

However, since human trafficking is such a specialized field, we believe that *experts in the field of human trafficking and those with direct experience working with survivors should be involved in the development of the curriculum*. Further, since new research and best practices regarding human trafficking are continuously evolving, *the curriculum should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that it is reflective of the most recent knowledge of human trafficking*. Additionally, we would further recommend that *any curriculum address both sex and labor trafficking*.

Finally, the MDHTTF would also suggest that any education on trafficking include *education on the safe and healthy use of technology and online communications to avoid violence and exploitation* and *education on healthy and non-violent relationships*. Since so many victims of trafficking are groomed by traffickers pretending to be an intimate partner, both of these components are crucial to a complete education on this topic intended to make students aware and prevent victimization.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf>.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force** urges a favorable report with amendments on **HB 461**.