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Written Testimony: FAVORABLE of **HB884**

**An Act concerning Public Health-Pregnancy-Coercion  
(Protecting Pregnant Women Against Coercive Abuse and Human Trafficking  
Coercive Abuse Against Mothers Prevention)**

As a pediatrician, medical educator, and a mother, I see this Bill as clear testament to the Public Health and Safety promoting efforts of the Maryland Assembly. **This Act recognizes that reproductive autonomy means first and foremost, freedom from coercion and violence.**

As a longtime member of the American Academy of Pediatrics I bring to your attention the December 2022 AAP Clinical Report  
**Exploitation, Labor and Sex Trafficking of Children and Adolescents: Health Care Needs of Patients**  
*Pediatrics* (2023) 151 (1): e2022060416.

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/151/1/e2022060416/190310/Exploitation-Labor-and-Sex-Trafficking-of-Children?autologincheck=redirected>

This clinical report speaks to increasing global and national trends on human trafficking and exploitation (T/E), the preponderance being or including sex trafficking and the typical age of entry into sex trafficking occurring in the 11 to 17 y/o age group (though much younger have been involved). There is reminder that such victims may present in a variety of health care settings and for myriad concerns that include trauma and reproductive issues. This Clinical Report notes the need for health care providers and staff training as well as careful and consistent use of screening tools for identifying T/E knowing that T/E victims may rarely spontaneously disclose their situation. Attention to public education and increasing awareness of T/E through signs, messages and posters in multiple languages and variety of locations is recommended. (Such locations include public and private facilities and institutions, waiting rooms, exam rooms and restrooms.) There must be established reporting lines and immediate safety measures to protect the victim when T/E is identified.

It should be noted here, that health care providers are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect and have reporting lines to law enforcement and child protective agencies. HB884(SB862) understandably can only address a subset of such child abuse, but as sex trafficking of a minor is such abuse, provider and staff awareness and training, reporting requirements and aid and protection services for victims should be the same. Facilities that offer abortion services --recognized as health care services at state and federal level-- may be

the first or only opportunity to identify and help young girls and adolescents caught up in T/E. Likewise, as minors caught up in T/E not uncommonly remain trapped into adulthood, every effort must be made to ensure an adult woman is fully informed and freely consents to an abortion procedure (*and any other invasive procedure such as placement of LARC or IUD*) without coercion, or can safely report and receive immediate aid/rescue from a coercive situation.

Regardless of initial circumstances--whether that of an immigrant girl or woman fleeing her country under the most desperate and dangerous of circumstances, or a young girl or teen homeless by family circumstances in this country or initially lured away by social or sexual attention—these girls, adolescents and women become trapped in a sex trade with its repeated cycle of emotional and physical abuse, and more often than not, chemical dependency.

**Pregnancy becomes part of their sexual trafficking experience. The sex traded adolescent girl or woman's life only has meaning to her handlers if she remains productive in the trade, so she is taken to an abortion center/or abortion services site.**

**If the abortion facility providers and staff** are trained to recognize a potentially trafficked person, understand the high risk for coercive abortions and take the time to **properly screen and counsel this adolescent girl or adult woman, offering help and protection**, that person is given hope and can muster the courage to reveal the coercion and accept the help, she desperately needs.

**This Act gives powerful attention to our most vulnerable girls and young women. This Act shows a path for protection from those who threaten or hold them in human or economic bondage due to pregnancy. This Act offers the trafficked pregnant teen or adult woman freedom** from the social and economic handcuffs that otherwise offer a very dim vision of the life ahead of her. **This Act acknowledges her reproductive autonomy and offers her a future where she makes her own choices.**

**Moreover, this Act recognizes that facilities that offer abortion services are providing health care and as such should be expected to operate by the same standards of counseling and reporting, as well as having associated resources and protections, as do state mandated reporters, when encountering clear or suspected child abuse, sexual assault, or admitted domestic abuse.**

**This ACT will save lives, perhaps two for one, that will have opportunity to be welcomed back to families or caring support systems and thrive in a more just society.**

**Without the requirements and protections this Act offers, centers and institutions that offer abortion services, knowingly or unknowingly, become complicit in the human and sex trafficking trade, which includes the coercive abuse of pregnant women.**

**Please vote FAVORABLE of HB884.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Shirley Reddoch, MD