

February 16, 2024

The Honorable Will Smith  
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB0550 - Children - Labor Trafficking - POSITION:  
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide favorable testimony on Senate Bill 550 (SB0550). With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, we empower Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to workforce development and career opportunities. The Social Services Administration (SSA) within DHS implements the Child Protective Services (CPS) program, which protects the same children as SB0550 through expanding the type of trafficking for which DHS can provide services to a child.

We strongly support SB0550 as it would aid the Department in protecting children from exploitation and abuse. Senate Bill 550 authorizes Child Protective Services to intervene in reported trafficking cases to assess safety and wellbeing of youth alleged to be victims of labor trafficking. Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) will have the opportunity to engage families, utilizing current family engagement practices, to evaluate the risk factors leading to the alleged labor trafficking and intervene in a prevention first service model to address risk factors or protect children from continued trafficking when required.

Senate Bill 550 intersects with our Social Services Administration Policy [SSA/CW#23-02](#) where labor trafficking is defined according to Maryland criminal law as "knowingly taking, placing, harboring, persuading, inducing, or enticing another by force, fraud, or coercion to provide services or labor or receiving a benefit or thing of value from the provision of services or labor by another that was induced by force, fraud, or coercion" (Criminal Law §3-1202(a)). If passed, SB0550 provides statutory support for implementing SSA/CW#23-02, and the policy would be amended to align definitions.

We offer the following technical amendment for consideration by the Committee to align the definitions of possible maltreaters in sex and labor trafficking. As currently written, the bill does not permit individuals who are not related to the alleged victim or do not share an address with the victim child to be eligible to receive a finding of abuse or neglect in cases of labor trafficking. This contrasts with the definition of sex trafficking,



which includes 'sex trafficking of a child by any individual' (existing Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 3-801(z)(2)). This divergence is significant, as it allows for any individual responsible for sex trafficking of a minor to receive a finding of abuse or neglect through CPS, regardless of relation or address. Including “by any individual” in the definition of labor trafficking would align it with the definition of sex trafficking and ensure that all individuals responsible for these forms of child exploitation are held accountable. As a result, the bill should expressly include “labor trafficking” in the definitions of abuse or neglect that trigger required child protective services investigations, Family Law §5-701, and in the corresponding child-in-need-of-assistance statutes, Courts and Judicial Proceedings §3-801.<sup>1</sup>

We appreciate the opportunity to provide favorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. We look forward to the decision of the Committee and welcome continued collaboration on SB0550.

If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at [rachel.sledge@maryland.gov](mailto:rachel.sledge@maryland.gov).

In service,



Rafael López  
Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> See Md. Code Ann., Family Law §5-701(b)(1)(ii) (defining “abuse” to include “sexual abuse”), (y)(2) (defining “sexual abuse” to include “sex trafficking of a child by any individual”); Md. Code Ann., Court and Judicial Proceedings. §3-801(b)(1), (z)(2) (same).