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DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Executive Nominations Committee

*Joint Committees*

Administrative, Executive, and  
Legislative Review

Children, Youth, and Families

Senate Chair, Legislative Ethics

*Chair*

Baltimore County Senate Delegation



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony for Senate Bill 550**  
**Children - Labor Trafficking**  
**February 16, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Smith, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I stand here before you in support of Senate Bill 550 (“SB 550”). For background, in 2019, we passed the *Child Sex Trafficking Screening and Services Act of 2019*, creating the Regional Navigator program and ensuring that every sex-trafficked victim under the age of 25 has access to local and specialized services. Since then, the program has expanded statewide, and countless victims of sex trafficking have been served by specialized, trauma-informed providers.

In 2023, we passed *Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking - Safe Harbor and Service Response*, decriminalizing prostitution, and a selection of other nonviolent offenses, for minors found to be victims of sex trafficking. While these important pieces of legislation have moved us closer towards the goal of helping young victims of human trafficking, we must work to close the gap for labor trafficking survivors—ensuring every young person who is a victim of human trafficking is able to access services immediately.

There is a high number of youth vulnerable to labor trafficking in Maryland. Maryland has received the fifth-greatest number of unaccompanied children (“UACs”) since FY15.<sup>1</sup> In the first few months of the 2024 fiscal year, Maryland has resettled 616 UACs in Prince George’s County, Montgomery County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County.<sup>2</sup> Because of their lack of access to language, social services, education on workers’ rights, and legal work opportunities, UACs and other foreign nationals are disproportionately vulnerable to labor trafficking. In fact, of the 15,886 victims of labor trafficking identified through the National Human Trafficking Hotline from 2018-

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement. (2023, December 28). Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by State. The Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-state>

<sup>2</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement. (2023, December 28). Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by County. The Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-county>

2020, 92% were foreign nationals.<sup>3</sup> For this reason alone, it is imperative that Regional Navigators, who currently serve only young victims of sex trafficking, expand to include young victims of labor trafficking, too.

Despite the abusive and exploitative nature of labor trafficking, unlike sex trafficking, labor trafficking of minors is not currently recognized as a form of child abuse or neglect. This means that as a state, we are not protecting and grossly underestimating the number of abused children in our communities. SB 550 would change this. SB 550 defines labor trafficking as a form of child abuse and neglect, therefore requiring a mandated report, thus ensuring that the most vulnerable among us are connected to critical legal, mental health, and social services.

Currently, funding for housing, including rental assistance, is an unallowable cost under the Regional Navigator Program. In Maryland, minor and young adult victims of sex and labor trafficking often lack options for where to live and with whom during and after their trafficking. Many of these young victims live in poverty, which is both a root cause and outcome of human trafficking, making housing stability even more out of reach. In response, SB 550 expands Regional Navigator funding to allow for housing costs, which is often one of the most fundamental and foundational needs of victims.

For all the above reasons, I ask that you support SB 550, with confidence that it would continue to move Maryland towards our goal of connecting every young victim of both sex *and* labor trafficking immediately to the services they need.

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<sup>3</sup> Polaris. (2023, September 27). Labor Trafficking on Specific Temporary Work Visas Report. A Data Analysis: 2018-2020. <https://polarisproject.org/labor-trafficking-on-specific-temporary-work-visas-report/>