



BILL NUMBER: SB153

TITLE: Maryland Department of Transportation - Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Awareness, Training, and Response

COMMITTEE: JPR

HEARING DATE: January 31, 2024

POSITION: Information

The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MHTTF), formed in 2007, is a collaborative of multiple disciplines, including law enforcement, prosecutors, victim service organizations, and state government agencies. The MHTTF has identified specific opportunities to improve Maryland's human trafficking-related statutes based on over a decade of local and national anti-trafficking experiences, consultation with state-based and federal partners, as well as time spent engaging with stakeholders across the state.

The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force respectfully provides the following information for consideration on this bill.

Transportation is a key resource used by survivors of trafficking to reduce the potential for harm while working in the commercial sex trade, such as safe passage from abusive situations and/or the ability to avoid working on the streets. Survivors rely on different modes of transportation from buses, trains, subways, and airports, as well as licensed and unlicensed taxi services and rideshare programs. To a trafficking survivor, accessible transportation is safety.

This bill, as drafted, provides for training, signage and protocol development for transportation employees in hopes of identifying and providing support for trafficked individuals. The nuanced nature of trafficking requires increased protections, and access to local resources. The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force works collaboratively and across disciplines to provide a comprehensive response to the issue of trafficking in our state. The Task Force can provide training and expertise across the state and should be involved in the development and implementation of training for transportation employees.

Additionally, in protocol development, identification of potential trafficking situation should only be done by qualified professionals who can quickly and safely provide support to those seeking assistance, rather than rely on the assumptions and stereotypes that most people hold with regard to those who trade sex. Requesting support from law enforcement upon the identification of a potential trafficking situation can lead to further harms, including incarceration and/or physical harm to the survivor. While law enforcement

is a key player in addressing human trafficking, their involvement must be solely at the express request of the survivor.

This bill also requests that the National Human Trafficking Hotline be given as an additional resource; however, providers across the state of Maryland have reported that these referrals do not commonly lead to additional support being provided locally. Most jurisdictions have local resources that should be contacted over national resources, like local trafficking task forces, regional navigators and other victim service providers. Local resources are more apt at responding immediately and ensure the survivor receives the assistance they need, which may include, but is not limited to, safe/emergency housing, legal assistance, or supportive counseling.

Despite these reservations concerning the training and reporting provisions of the bill, we recognize that transportation workers are in a unique position to help identify potential trafficking situations. As a result, we would welcome an opportunity to discuss potential amendments to the current language of the bill so that it does not risk causing additional harm to all those who trade sex, including survivors of trafficking.

For more information, please contact:

Amanda Rodriguez, Esq.
arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org
(410) 377-8111 (o)

or

Melanie Shapiro
mshapiro@mnadv.org
(301) 852-3930