



HB508

Children - Labor Trafficking

House Judiciary Committee

Hearing Date: February 15, 2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

My name is Andrea Carroll, and I am the Director of Behavioral Health Services at Board of Child Care (BCC). I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of BCC regarding *HB508 Children – Labor Trafficking* to encourage your support of this bill.

BCC provides a continuum of services to youth and families across Maryland. We have locations in six counties and provide care to hundreds of families each year through community-based, residential, and educational programs. The youth we serve are at high risk for human trafficking due to complex trauma and abuse histories, behavioral health challenges, developmental delays, out of home placements, poverty, and immigration status. We have dedicated trauma-responsive services for survivors of sex trafficking in our high intensity residential program, Caminos shelter and home study post release services programs, and our Anne Arundel County community-based Regional Navigator Program (RNP).

While our RNP was created to serve survivors of sex trafficking, our hope is to end all trafficking in Anne Arundel County through education, identification, and connection to resources. We do the best we can to meet the needs of labor trafficking victims referred to our program but need the full support of the law to better identify these youth and connect them to necessary resources.

We need to achieve parity for labor trafficking survivors.

Our vision for Maryland is that every young person who is a victim of human trafficking is able to access services immediately. In 2019, Maryland passed the *Child Sex Trafficking Screening and Services Act of 2019*, creating the Regional Navigator program and ensuring that every sex-trafficked individual under age 25 has access to local and specialized services. Since then, the program has expanded statewide, and countless minors and young adult victims of sex trafficking have been served by specialized, trauma-informed providers.

While this important legislation has moved us closer towards our goal of serving every young victim of human trafficking, we need to close the gap for labor trafficking survivors.

Maryland youth are not adequately protected from labor trafficking.

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 FY15.¹ In the first two months of FY24 alone

¹ 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>

(October 1, 2023-November 30, 2023), Maryland resettled 616 UACs in Prince George's County, Montgomery County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County.² 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 2018-2020, 92% were foreign nationals.³ 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 a recognized form of child abuse or neglect. This means that as a state, we are not protecting and are grossly underestimating the number of abused children in our communities. HB508 would change this, defining labor trafficking as a form of child abuse and neglect, therefore a mandated report, ensuring that the most vulnerable among us are connected to critical legal, mental health, and social services.

Housing resources are a primary need for human trafficking survivors.

Currently, funding for housing, including rental assistance, is an unallowable cost under the Regional Navigator Program. In Maryland, we have found that minor and young adult victims of sex and labor trafficking often lack safe housing options 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 to this need, HB508 would expand Regional Navigator funding to allow for housing costs, which is often one of the most fundamental and foundational needs of victims.

HB508 will strengthen existing Maryland law to support child trafficking survivors by ensuring protections and resources for youth who are impacted by labor trafficking, as well as increase access to safe housing resources for all young survivors of trafficking.

For all the above reasons, Board of Child Care supports HB508, 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.

Sincerely,



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² 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>

³ 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/>