



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 12, 2024

House Bill 620

**Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program -
Human and Sex Trafficking
House Ways and Means Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 620 requires age-appropriate educational programming on awareness and prevention of human trafficking to be included in existing sexual abuse and assault prevention curriculum for students in grades six through eight.

Promoting awareness about the realities of human trafficking is essential in the fight to combat it. Horribly, Maryland's central location has facilitated its development as both a pass-through state and a destination for human traffickers. Traffickers utilize many of Maryland's highways, especially Interstate-95, to connect victims to major east coast cities such as New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force has identified incidents of sex trafficking at Maryland truck stops, and data from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) suggests that approximately 70 percent of human trafficking incidents occur in our nation's truck stops.¹ Unfortunately, few Marylanders are aware of the presence of human trafficking in the state, leaving traffickers hidden and children more vulnerable to exploitation. Education on the awareness and prevention of human trafficking in an age-appropriate way for all students in Maryland is a crucial first step in adding more eyes and ears to anti-trafficking efforts.

At risk youth can better prepare themselves with age-appropriate education regarding human trafficking. Children in sixth through eighth grade have technology at their disposal that lends itself to dangerous situations. The average age of entry into the commercial sex trade ranges

¹ <http://www.mdhumantrafficking.org/maryland>

between the ages of 12-14.² While they are exploring their friendships and using social media to connect, they are a prime target for human trafficking. A 2020 report indicated a 125% increase in Facebook recruitment trafficking and 95% increase of recruitment trafficking on Instagram.³ With the rise of technology exploitation, traffickers can easily connect with victims through fake profiles and establish trust before exploiting their victims in person. Age-appropriate education will allow for students to connect to the material and lead to discussion, problem solving, and meaningful activities that will allow for them to become aware of the risks and armed with tools to combat suspicious activity. The introduction of this age-appropriate education will enable youth to realize they are valued members of society and empower them to be advocates for themselves and others against human trafficking. Pope Francis frequently condemns the horror of trafficking in persons, declaring, “Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ.”⁴

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **HB 620**.

Thank you for your consideration.

² https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/USDOE_UseCase_HT_2017.pdf

³ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/blog/2022/07/technologys-complicated-relationship-human-trafficking>

⁴ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140410_tratta-persone-umane.html