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**Senator Shelly Hettleman Testimony in Support of SB 473  
Public Utilities - For-Hire Drivers and Transportation Network Operators -  
Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Training and Liability**

SB473 strengthens Maryland's response to human trafficking by requiring awareness training for licensed taxicab drivers, for-hire drivers and transportation network drivers. It also includes good Samaritan provisions to protect those who report suspected trafficking in good faith.

Human trafficking is not a distant or abstract issue. It occurs in all 50 states, including Maryland, and affects individuals across age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security reports that trafficking has been identified nationwide, in urban, suburban, and rural communities alike.<sup>1</sup> National data further demonstrates the scale of the problem. In 2024 alone, the National Human Trafficking Hotline identified nearly 12,000 potential trafficking situations involving more than 21,000 potential victims across the country.<sup>2</sup> Law enforcement agencies reported nearly 3,000 human trafficking incidents in 2022, representing thousands of victimizations.<sup>3</sup> These figures represent only reported cases; experts consistently acknowledge that trafficking is significantly underreported. Maryland is not immune. Since the inception of the National Human Trafficking Hotline, more than 2,000 cases and over 3,500 victims have been identified in connection with our state.<sup>4</sup> Maryland's geographic location between Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York makes it both a destination and transit point for traffickers.

Professional drivers are uniquely positioned to observe potential indicators of trafficking. For-hire drivers, including taxicab operators and transportation network drivers, interact daily with passengers in situations that may reveal warning signs: individuals who appear fearful, controlled, disoriented, or unable to speak for themselves. Since trafficking often involves transportation between locations, drivers may be among the few neutral third parties to encounter a victim outside the trafficker's immediate control. Senate Bill 473 addresses this reality in two key ways.

First, it requires applicants for certain for-hire driver licenses and transportation network operator licenses to complete a human trafficking awareness training program and share completion verification with the Public Service Commission. This training would educate drivers on how to recognize indicators of trafficking, understand how to appropriately report potential cases, and respond safely. Awareness is a powerful tool. When drivers are informed about the signs of trafficking, they are better equipped to connect victims with help.

Second, the bill provides civil and criminal liability protection for licensed drivers who report or respond in good faith to suspected human trafficking incidents. Fear of legal consequences can deter well-intentioned individuals from acting. By extending good-faith protections, SB473 ensures that drivers who make responsible reports are not punished for attempting to assist a potential victim. Importantly, the protection applies only to good-faith actions and does not shield malicious or knowingly false conduct.

The bill aligns with broader national efforts to engage transportation professionals in anti-trafficking work. The U.S. Department of Transportation has emphasized the important role that transportation systems play in identifying and disrupting trafficking networks and offers a respected training program. We have also learned that some TNC companies already require their drivers to participate as well. Making trafficking awareness part of licensing requirements reflects the understanding that it takes coordination between many sectors to effectively combat this crime. It is also important to emphasize what this bill does not do. It does not impose significant operational burdens on drivers or companies. It does not require drivers to conduct investigations or place themselves in danger. It does not alter existing criminal statutes. Rather, it

ensures that drivers receive basic, standardized awareness training and are protected when they report suspicious activity responsibly.

In recent years, Maryland has made important progress in fighting human trafficking by improving coordination among agencies and taking seriously the needs of victims. SB473 builds on that foundation by empowering a group of professionals who are already positioned on the front lines of community observation. Human trafficking thrives in silence and invisibility. By equipping drivers with knowledge and protecting them when they act, we disrupt that invisibility, and we reinforce the message that Maryland will use every reasonable and responsible tool at its disposal to combat exploitation.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to give Senate Bill 473 a favorable report.