

SB 473 FAV MDHTTF.pdf

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BILL NUMBER: SB 473

TITLE: Public Utilities - For-Hire Drivers and Transportation Network Operators - Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Training and Liability

COMMITTEE: Finance

HEARING DATE: 2/18/2026

POSITION: FAV

The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF) is Maryland's coordinated, multi-disciplinary response to human trafficking, bringing together federal, state, and local law enforcement, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations to identify and support survivors and hold traffickers accountable. The Legislative Subcommittee includes members from law enforcement, victim advocacy organizations, service providers, government entities, and faith-based partners, and works to improve Maryland's human trafficking laws, partner with legislators, and testify on key legislation each session. On behalf of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force Legislative Subcommittee, we respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 473.

SB 473 requires applicants for specified for-hire driver and transportation network operator licenses, including taxicab drivers licensed by local jurisdictions and drivers regulated by the Public Service Commission, to provide documentation that they have completed human trafficking awareness and prevention training as part of the licensing and renewal process. The bill specifies that training may include the U.S. Department of Transportation's Leaders Against Human Trafficking/Combating Human Trafficking in the Transportation Sector curriculum or another nationally recognized human trafficking awareness program, and it must cover how to recognize potential trafficking victims, how to respond appropriately, and how to connect individuals with available resources. By embedding these requirements in the licensing framework, SB 473 ensures that thousands of drivers who regularly interact with members of the public are equipped with practical tools to identify and safely respond to possible trafficking situations.

The Task Force supports targeted training in the transportation sector because traffickers routinely use cars, taxicabs, and transportation network services to move victims between residences, hotels, short-term rentals, and commercial locations. For-hire drivers and transportation network operators are often among the few non-exploitative adults who see victims in transit, sometimes

repeatedly, and may notice red flags such as controlling companions, lack of personal possessions, or signs of fear or coercion. Providing standardized training on indicators of sex and labor trafficking, trauma-informed ways to interact with potential victims, and safe reporting pathways can turn these everyday interactions into critical opportunities for intervention and support.

SB 473 also provides that licensed taxicab drivers, for-hire drivers, and transportation network operators may not be held civilly or criminally liable for reporting or responding in good faith to a suspected incident of human trafficking. This good-faith immunity is an essential complement to the training requirement, as many drivers are reluctant to come forward for fear of misinterpreting a situation, facing retaliation, or becoming entangled in legal proceedings. By clearly protecting drivers who act in good faith, the bill reduces barriers to reporting, encourages earlier engagement with law enforcement and service providers, and supports a culture in which safety concerns related to trafficking are taken seriously and shared promptly.

Importantly, SB 473 integrates human trafficking awareness into existing regulatory structures that already require criminal background checks and driving record reviews for for-hire drivers and transportation network operators. This approach minimizes administrative burden while leveraging established licensing processes to deliver consistent, statewide training standards across counties, municipalities, and transportation network companies. The Task Force views such systemic, sector-wide education as a core element of Maryland's comprehensive strategy to prevent and reduce human trafficking, alongside strong criminal statutes, victim services, and enforcement efforts.

For these reasons, the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force Legislative Subcommittee respectfully urges the Finance Committee to issue a Favorable report on Senate Bill 473.

For further inquiries, please contact Amanda Rodriguez, Esq., Chair, MDHTTF Legislative Committee, at arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org.

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_SB473.pdf

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 18, 2026

Senate Bill 473

**Public Utilities - For-Hire Drivers and Transportation Network Operators -
Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Training and Liability
Senate Finance 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.

Senate Bill 473 requires an applicant for certain for-hire driver's licenses and transportation network operator's licenses to submit to the Public Service Commission documentation verifying that the applicant completed a certain human trafficking awareness training program; and prohibiting licensed taxicab drivers, for-hire drivers, or transportation network operators from being held civilly or criminally liable for reporting or responding to in good faith a suspected incident of human trafficking.

The Maryland Catholic Conference supports this legislation because it emphasizes the importance of equipping transportation professionals with the knowledge and tools necessary to identify and report human trafficking. Training those working in the transportation sector is critical to reducing trafficking, supporting law enforcement efforts, and increasing public awareness about how to intervene safely and effectively.

Maryland's central location makes it a significant hub for human trafficking, serving as both a pass-through state and a destination for traffickers. Traffickers frequently utilize Maryland's extensive transportation network, including major highways like Interstate 95, to connect victims to large East Coast cities such as New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Incidents of sex trafficking have been identified at Maryland truck stops, with data from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center indicating that approximately 70% of trafficking cases in the U.S. occur at truck stops.¹

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

Recent cases illustrate how transportation hubs facilitate trafficking. For example, in a 2024 case in Maryland, a trafficker recruited women in Hagerstown transported them across Maryland to Baltimore and exploited them in hotels near BWI Marshall Airport and local stadiums.² These examples underscore the critical need for targeted training and awareness initiatives. Pope Leo has stated, “Ultimately, the violence of human trafficking can be overcome only through a renewed vision that beholds every individual as a beloved child of God.”³ This bill represents an important step in addressing the exploitation of vulnerable individuals by equipping key sectors with the training and tools necessary to recognize and prevent trafficking. By strengthening awareness and response efforts, it makes a meaningful contribution to the fight against child exploitation and human trafficking in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **SB 473**.

Thank you for your consideration.

² <https://mcasa.org/news/post/maryland-sex-trafficking-case-shows-typical-red-flags-for-exploitation-expe>

³ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2026-02/pope-leo-xiv-world-day-against-human-trafficking-message.html#:~:text=Pope%20Leo%20said%20the%20same,of%20God%2C%E2%80%9D%20he%20said>

SB473 Testimony_University of Maryland SAFE Center

Uploaded by: Majaella Ruden

Position: FAV



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
SAFE CENTER
FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS
MPOWERING THE STATE

SUPPORT, ADVOCACY, FREEDOM, AND EMPOWERMENT CENTER

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 473

TITLE: Public Utilities - For-Hire Drivers and Transportation Network Operators - Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Training and Liability

COMMITTEE: Finance

HEARING DATE: February 18th, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

The University of Maryland Support, Advocacy, Freedom, and Empowerment (SAFE) Center for Human Trafficking Survivors is a comprehensive services, research, and advocacy center for human trafficking survivors. Our mission is to provide survivor-centered and trauma-informed services that empower sex and labor trafficking survivors to heal and reclaim their lives, and to prevent trafficking and better serve survivors through research and policy advocacy. Since 2016, the SAFE Center has provided specialized wrap-around legal, social, crisis intervention, mental health, and economic empowerment services to over 600 human trafficking survivors and their family members in Maryland.

The SAFE Center is an initiative of the University of Maryland Strategic Partnership: MPowering the State – a collaboration between the University of Maryland, Baltimore and the University of Maryland, College Park. We are part of the Graduate School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

As a member of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force Legislative Committee, the SAFE Center strongly supports SB473 for the reasons the Legislative Committee stated in its testimony:

1. SB473 will empower Maryland drivers to identify potential cases of exploitation and respond in a way that protects their own safety and reduces risks of harm to victims.
2. SB473 stipulates that licensed taxicab drivers, for-hire drivers, and transportation network operators may not be held civilly or criminally liable for reporting or responding in good faith to a suspected incident of human trafficking, which reduces an important potential barrier to reporting of human trafficking concerns to law enforcement.
3. By integrating human trafficking prevention training into existing regulatory structures for licensing of for-hire drivers and transportation network operators, SB 473 minimizes administrative burden while also promoting consistent statewide training.

Targeted training for for-hire drivers and transportation network operators as required by SB473 is important: Since traffickers often rely on taxicabs and transportation network services to transport victims, they may witness the exploitation of victims and be in a position to identify

trafficking victims or individuals who may be vulnerable to trafficking. The required training specified in the legislation on how to recognize trafficking victims, respond appropriately, and connect individuals with resources will serve to support survivors at risk, hold traffickers accountable, as well as to prevent trafficking.

At the SAFE Center, we have seen cases where traffickers used for-hire driver services to transport victims and thus to unwittingly facilitate the trafficking. With this legislation in place, there is a chance that a trained driver could play a role in reporting trafficking and helping to lead survivors to services and safety.

For these reasons, **the University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 473.**

Sincerely,

Susan Esserman
Founder and CEO
University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors

SB473_FAV_Hettleman.pdf

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Position: FAV

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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.¹ 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.² Law enforcement agencies reported nearly 3,000 human trafficking incidents in 2022, representing thousands of victimizations.³ 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.⁴ 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.