



HB 1348 — Human Trafficking — Reports to Regional Navigators and Prosecutions — Authorization

Position: Favorable

Hearing: *House Judiciary Committee — February 26, 2026*

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 1348. I am submitting testimony on behalf of Center for Hope, a comprehensive violence intervention and prevention initiative of *LifeBridge Health* dedicated to supporting survivors of trauma, abuse, exploitation, and violence across the lifespan. Our work spans child abuse, domestic and community violence, elder abuse, and human trafficking through coordinated medical, forensic, mental health, and advocacy services.

Center for Hope houses one of Maryland's nationally accredited Child Advocacy Centers, provides hospital-based violence response teams, trauma-focused clinical care, and community outreach and education. In the most recent reported year, our collective programs served thousands of individuals impacted by abuse, violence, exploitation, and related trauma. This legislation rightly aligns reporting requirements with existing service infrastructure — particularly the *Regional Navigator program* established under Maryland law to facilitate identification, referral, safety planning, advocacy, and trauma-informed services for survivors of sex or labor trafficking.

Current reporting pathways for suspected child abuse and exploitation may not always connect victims promptly to the services they need, especially in trafficking cases where formal reporting channels can introduce delays. HB 1348 allows mandated reporters, including health professionals and social service workers embedded in systems like Center for Hope to report suspected trafficking directly to a Regional Navigator. This change:

- Facilitates earlier engagement with trauma specialists capable of coordinating safety planning, advocacy, and basic needs support;
- Improves screening and identification accuracy with providers trained in recognizing coercion and exploitation indicators; and
- Reduces barriers to care for victims who may not be identified through traditional Child Protective or law enforcement routes.

Regional Navigators act as centralized coordinators for wraparound services and multidisciplinary teams involving law enforcement, healthcare, and community partners. By explicitly authorizing the Attorney General or a local State's Attorney to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses, HB 1348 reinforces Maryland's commitment to holding traffickers accountable and strengthening deterrence. These prosecutorial authorities can work in coordination with Regional Navigator referrals to ensure that victim safety and justice are pursued in parallel.

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Center for Hope's trauma-informed services including comprehensive forensic interviews, medical care, mental health support, advocacy, and long-term case management are essential parts of recovery for trafficking survivors and structurally aligned with the intent of HB 1348 to connect victims to care sooner after identification.

For survivors of human trafficking, every moment matters in escaping exploitation, accessing safety, and beginning healing. By enhancing reporting pathways and clarifying prosecutorial authority, HB 1348 strengthens Maryland's ability to protect its most vulnerable residents, connect them to critical services, and deliver justice for crimes of exploitation. We urge a favorable report on House Bill 1348.

Respectfully,

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