



**BILL NUMBER:** House Bill 1348

**TITLE:** Human Trafficking – Reports to Regional Navigators and Prosecutions – Authorization

**COMMITTEE:** Judiciary

**HEARING DATE:** February 26th, 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.

The SAFE Center has served as the Regional Navigator for Montgomery County since 2019 and for Prince George's County since 2020. As Regional Navigator, we provide screening for trafficking, direct comprehensive services, and trafficking prevention programs. We also work in the community to provide human trafficking awareness trainings to local youth-serving partners, such as the Department of Juvenile Services, Department of Social Services, high schools in both counties, and nonprofit partners such as Liberty's Promise.

The SAFE Center's Regional Navigator services have facilitated long-term growth, development, and healing for youth. This includes justice involved youth who had never before been identified as being at risk of or having suffered from trafficking. For example, for one such youth who was subject to trafficking at age 15, we provided long-term intensive case management, helping her and her family access mental health resources, advocating for her to finish high school, and connecting her with additional school resources. We worked with her until she graduated high school, empowering her to start to build her future.

The Regional Navigator program is a very important resource for at risk or trafficked youth in Maryland. HB1348 would create an additional avenue for vulnerable youth to receive access to services available in each county. HB1348 would permit Maryland's healthcare practitioners,

police officers, educators, and human service workers to directly notify Regional Navigators of suspected sex trafficking or labor trafficking cases.

By establishing additional pathways for referring cases to Regional Navigators, more at-risk and trafficked youth will receive access to services that create a path out of trafficking. This will better effectuate the goals of the Regional Navigator program and maximize our collective impact.

Many youth-serving professionals are overburdened, including mandatory reporters. As a result of HB1348, youth-serving professionals will be able to more immediately respond to trafficking concerns by contacting specialized service providers like the SAFE Center.

For these reasons, **the University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors urges a favorable report on House Bill 1348.**

Sincerely,

Jatna Fortuna  
Regional Navigator (Prince George's County and Montgomery County)  
Director of Community Engagement and Special Programs  
University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors

Susan Esserman  
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