

## Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

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<b>BILL NO:</b>	House Bill 824
<b>TITLE:</b>	Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Conviction of Distribution of Controlled Dangerous Substance
<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	Judiciary
<b>HEARING DATE:</b>	March 3, 2026
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>FAVORABLE</b>

[The Human Trafficking Prevention Project](#) (“HTPP”) is dedicated to ending the criminalization of sex workers, survivors of human trafficking, and those populations put at highest risk of exploitation through access to civil legal services and support for policies that dismantle harmful systems and increase access to basic human rights and legal relief. **The HTPP supports House Bill 824.**

House Bill 824 will add a conviction for distributing or dispensing a controlled dangerous substance (§ 5–602(a)(1)) to the list of felony convictions eligible under MD. CRIM. PRO. § 10-110. At the HTPP, we frequently work with survivors of human trafficking who have been forced to commit criminal acts by their traffickers, as well as survivors of other types of gender-based violence who have been forced to do the same. One of the most common ways these perpetrators insulate themselves against detection by law enforcement is by distributing drugs for them, which results in a conviction for distributing or dispensing a controlled dangerous substance, which is not currently eligible for expungement.

The anti-trafficking movement is far more frequently recognizing the overlap between sex and labor trafficking, whereby victims may be exploited for sex but also forced to commit other forms of labor including forced drug sales. In a study of labor trafficking victims who had experienced forced criminality before the age of 22, [the most common underlying crime was drug distribution](#). In the infamous [Victor Rax case](#), Rax, a trusted member of the immigrant community in which he lived, would groom his male victims through excessive gifts and acts of affection with the initial goal of getting his victims to deal drugs for him. He used that money to maintain several vacant properties where he would take his victims and sexually assault them. Many of his victims said that one of the major reasons they delayed reporting what Rax had done to them is that they feared being arrested. More specifically, they thought police would see them first as drug dealers, not abuse victims. This story illustrates the power of forced criminality.

House Bill 824 would provide criminalized survivors with an opportunity to petition the court for expungement of this particular conviction, as long as they are able to meet the other criteria of the expungement statute such as the waiting period and the subsequent conviction rule. For criminalized survivors, the inclusion of this incredibly stigmatizing conviction would be a lifesaving opportunity and a critical bridge for these crime victims as they try to move on with their lives after violence and trauma. **For these reasons, the Human Trafficking Prevention Project supports House Bill 824 and respectfully urges a favorable report.**

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**Survival Should Not Be Criminalized.**