



MARYLAND
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

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February 9, 2026

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130 Taylor House Office Building
131 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

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RE: HB 355 Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking

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Position: SUPPORT

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Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral-level psychologists throughout the state, asks the House Ways and Means Committee to report FAVORABLY on HB 355.

Representative to APA Council

Mary Fernandes, Ph.D.

Human trafficking is a \$150 Billion industry, and estimates range from 27-41 million victims worldwide. It does not discriminate on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, and it hides in plain sight. The aim of this bill is to bring it out of the darkness, so it can no longer hide.

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Beatrice Gerry, Ph.D.

Trafficking is able to thrive because most people do not know how to identify trafficking when they see it. Youth do not know how to identify the red flags that will lure them into trafficking schemes. Misleading information on social media makes them think traffickers are coming to kidnap them off the streets, but that is rarely the case. Trafficking is a business, and it functions by luring young people in through grooming. Middle-schoolers are the perfect age to be educated about the way traffickers operate, so that they can avoid falling into their traps. Providing this three-year program will instill accurate and life-saving information into Maryland youth, hopefully preventing them from being lured into a life from which they may never recover.

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We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 355. If we can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact MPA's Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D. at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Legislative

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.

Respectfully submitted,

Membership

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Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.

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cc: Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs

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