

BILL NO: House Bill 1150
TITLE: Commercial sex trafficking, prostitution, etc.; mistake of age defense.
COMMITTEE: Courts of Justice; Subcommittee #1
DATE: February 2, 2022
POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chairperson Adams and Subcommittee Members:

Thank you for hearing testimony on House Bill 1150 relating to increasing accountability for offenders of child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC).

Shared Hope International has been working in Virginia, across the country, and throughout the globe for over 20 years to guide and support appropriate responses to protect survivors, hold offenders to account, and ultimately prevent the crime entirely. 12 years ago we launched the State Report Card project to assess the status of state's laws and drive legislative progress. Under the project's [initial](#) and [updated](#) legislative frameworks, we have continuously advocated for impactful and appropriate accountability for offenders of child sex trafficking, including traffickers, buyers, and facilitators.

The conduct of buyers—purchasing or offering to purchase sex acts or performances with a child—and resulting traumatic impact has historically been underrecognized and minimized. Many state human trafficking laws, including Virginia's, fail to include buyer conduct (e.g., purchasing, patronizing, or soliciting); further, other applicable commercial sexual exploitation offenses provide loopholes for buyers to avoid accountability. This disparity in criminal responses to traffickers versus buyers perpetuates the fabricated hierarchy of harm, undermining survivors' voice and experiences depicting the serious violence and long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological injury caused by buyers.

HB 1150 addresses the State Report Card project's [Policy Goal 1.4](#) which calls on states to enact legislation to prohibit buyers from raising mistake-of-age defenses in prosecutions for child sex trafficking or CSEC. The harm caused by buyers of sex with children is not mitigated by the buyer's provable perception or knowledge of the child's age; clarifying state law that prohibits buyers from raising inappropriate defenses ensures that Virginia prioritizes protections for child victims and eliminates a statutory weakness that allows serious offenders to avoid accountability.

HB 1150 is a critical piece of legislation for protecting child and youth victims of sex trafficking and CSEC. We are grateful for the Subcommittee's dedication to this issue and respectfully ask for your support.

Sincerely,

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For questions or additional information:
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