

My name is Barbara Amaya. I am a survivor of sex trafficking and I am writing in support of Delegate Tata's HB 1426.

I grew up until the age of 12 in Fairfax Virginia. I was abused in my home for the first time when I was a young child, I remember around the age of 7-8 years old – first by my father and then by my brother. I always wondered if my brother was influenced by my father's behavior. In any event, I ran away from home a number of times, the first time when I was 12 years old. The police were always catching me and bringing me back and no one understood or asked why I was running away.

I went through both the Juvenile Justice System and the Child Welfare Systems, and eventually my parent's rights to me were taken away. I spent time in the Alexandria Detention Center, reform schools, and hospital centers for children with problems. My mother was in complete denial. I tried to tell her once what was happening but she couldn't believe me or didn't want to. So I kept running away. I would go down to DuPont Circle or the Georgetown area. Before long people were noticing me there and one day a woman picked me up. I was around 13 years old. She took me back to her apartment and told me I could stay there with her. She and her trafficker began to groom me for prostitution. She took me out onto the track to a restaurant on 14<sup>th</sup> Street & I, near Casino Royale. There were a lot of hotels in that area – still are. She told me the man in her apartment was her boyfriend, now I realize he was a trafficker, she gave him all the money she got from selling me to the men.

One day when I was almost 14 they sold me to another pimp. He went by "Moses" and he was vicious. Moses sold me to anyone and everyone. For years I was in and out of weekly hotels. I worked East side and West side with his other "ladies," as he called us. He had three or four girls, all of us living separately in and out of various hotels. He had a big quota (amount of money I had to bring in) and if I didn't make it he would take out a wire coat hanger and whip me mercilessly over and over again. I still remember the first whipping. The pain was so intense it radiated through my entire body. The thin t-shirt I had on was no defense, and neither were my hands and arms. I tried to shield my face from his blows. He hit me over and over again. I started to shake and cry uncontrollably and my shirt was red from the blood. I prayed to God for help, but no one came to help me. I was all alone and I wanted to die

After that I did whatever he wanted me to do for fear he would beat me again. He always hit me or hurt me to get me to do what he wanted me to do. He never called me by my name, only "Bitch," or "Whore." I got arrested so many times because in those days the police would round all the girls up every other day and put us in jail. Moses never bailed me out. So I would just sit in jail until they let me out. Finally, when I had been arrested so many times, they decided to put me in prison on Rikers Island. I remember being so scared because of the stories I'd heard about Rikers. I took the guard aside and said, "I'm not really 18, I'm only a minor." They found my parents and called them to come get me. But there must have been some kind of corruption in the system too because while I was in the waiting room waiting for my parents, Moses showed up and took me. He beat me within an inch of my life.

Around that time I also started using drugs that were given to me. At first it was anything I could to numb the pain but in short time, I began using heroin and pretty quickly I was addicted. With all the beatings and violence and abuse, I got pretty hardened, but somewhere inside me I was able to protect a small little place – a place that loves life, loves animals; it was some kind of survival mechanism to keep me going. Now I look back and I think that God must have kept me alive through all of this for some reason. I survived an awful lot – jumping in and out of cars of violent johns, crazy serial killers, and being run by violent pimps.

Today I have a lot of health problems – high blood pressure, diabetes, PTSD, depression, feet and terrible back problems, I have uterine cancer and had a complete hysterectomy, and I believe the fact that I was trafficked and exposed to so many different men is directly related to how I got HPV and cancer. When I first came out I was addicted to heroin and had to deal with that.

Sometimes the men used condoms, but sometimes they didn't – I wasn't able to control the situation. I never said this before but I've had abortions that were a result of being sold for sex. I didn't know what was happening to

me: I only had a 6- grade education. I left school when I was 12 years old. When I finally got out – after some 15 years on the street – I was nearly 30. I tried to put my life together as best as I could. I went back to school, found work, got married, tried to have a child and found out I was unable to do so. I had to have surgery to repair the damage done to my young body, then I was able to have one child. I am in favor of this legislation because health providers need to know how to identify victims of trafficking. If one of those times I was in the hospital or in a doctors office someone had asked me some questions I would have understood what happened to me a lot sooner and could have gotten help for the physical and mental health issues I had.

I have published two books, one an award-winning memoir, Nobody's Girl: A Memoir of Lost Innocence, Modern Day Slavery and Transformation, that chronicles my time growing up while being trafficked on the streets of New York, the second book, The Destiny of Zoe Carpenter, is a graphic novel aimed at educating young students about human trafficking. I have lent my expert testimony in multiple venues across the United States in hopes of bringing help, health and prevention to others so that they never have to experience what I have.

**Barbara Amaya, Survivor**