



January 26, 2023

Honorable Delegates,

I am writing to beseech you to pass HB 2131, a two-year pilot project to develop services for youth who are victims of sex trafficking while also strengthening the focus law enforcement places on sex buyers who fuel this heinous practice of purchasing children and teens for sexual pleasure.

Sex trafficking has been alive and well for eons and is only becoming more prevalent. I was sold nightly in residences located in Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, and Portsmouth in the early eighties by my trafficker. There was no shortage of buyers then, and there is definitely not now.

While anyone can fall prey to traffickers, our youth are incredibly vulnerable to being groomed and sold by these master manipulators. Children in foster care, dealing with homelessness, throwaway children, and those with layers of vulnerability are most at risk. When they find themselves trapped in the horrendous darkness of sexual abuse, torture, and slavery it feels neverending with no way out and no one to turn to.

Traffickers utilize brainwashing, conditioning, force, threats, and every scheme and trick imaginable to get and keep total control of their victims. When you are being trafficked, even if you have someone you could tell, you know full well their life or yours is in grave danger if you talk. Traffickers make sure you know the extent of what they are capable of to further ensure you will not reach out or run.

These children have come from such backgrounds fraught with pain, loss, and abandonment they have become accustomed to having to depend on themselves alone. They are caught in something they did not choose and should never be arrested like a criminal. Rather they should be treated as one victimized by a terrible crime, and provided with services and needed care.

This bill will not only provide needed services and exit strategies to those trapped in trafficking, it will also encourage police to target and arrest buyers, the very people fueling the demand the crime of trafficking meets. Though I have seen other bills pass mandating coalitions or teams that go nowhere due to one hand not communicating with the other, and/or lack of funding being appropriated to cover the bill's mandates, I am hopeful you will not allow that to be the case with this bill.

As a survivor and professional who has worked in the counter-trafficking field providing direct services to victims and training law enforcement, medical professionals, and service providers for over a decade, I assure you this bill, when implemented properly, is much needed and will undoubtedly reveal the magnitude of the issue at hand.

Most sincerely,

Kathy Bryan
CEO/Founder