

BILL NO: House Bill 581
TITLE: Human trafficking; attorneys for the Commonwealth to establish multidisciplinary response teams.
COMMITTEE: Cities, Counties, and Towns; Subcommittee #1
DATE: January 26, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chairperson Shin and Subcommittee Members:

Thank you for hearing testimony on House Bill 581 relating to the plight of child sex trafficking victims within the state.

Shared Hope International is a non-profit organization dedicated to preventing, restoring, and bringing justice to survivors of child and youth sex trafficking. Shared Hope 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. Thirteen years ago, we launched the State Report Card project to assess the status of state's laws and drive legislative progress. Despite its progress on addressing this issue, [Virginia received an 'F'](#) in 2023, scoring a 48 out of 100.

House Bill 581 ("HB 581"), if passed, would require attorneys for the Commonwealth to establish multidisciplinary human trafficking response teams that would (i) discuss implementation of protocols and policies; (ii) establish and review guidelines for the community's response to various forms of human trafficking, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking; and (iii) review protocols for the trauma-informed, victim-centered collection, preservation, and secure storage of evidence from physical evidence recovery kit examinations, among other things.

[Collaborative, multidisciplinary groups](#) ("MDTs") addressing human trafficking have become essential in the national fight against human trafficking and the provision of necessary services and resources to survivors. This response model, which includes various disciplines working collaboratively, is encouraged by the U.S. Department of Justice and is recognized worldwide as a best practice in the anti-trafficking field.¹ Through MDTs, law enforcement, child welfare, service providers, advocates, other professionals, as well as the child and their family can work collaboratively to prioritize the wellbeing of the survivor and provide trauma-informed support and services.

Survivors of child sex trafficking often have complex needs that cannot be addressed by a single agency or service provider; instead, survivors need support from a number of service providers addressing various needs, including physical health, mental health, reproductive health, malnutrition, substance use, and self-destructive behaviors.² While some of their needs are shared by other children who have experienced abuse or trauma, it is important that child sex trafficking victims not only receive a broad array of treatment but that treatment is specialized to the unique trauma associated with commercial sexual exploitation.³ An MDT response provides a comprehensive, coordinated effort that creates increased capacity to meet a myriad of needs through a specialized service response. Additionally, this increased capacity to meet survivor's needs will support law enforcement and prosecutors' ability to hold offenders accountable by increasing a survivor's capacity and ability to participate in the criminal legal process. Therefore, state law should mandate a survivor-centered MDT response be utilized for child sex trafficking cases.

¹ Office for Victims of Crimes (n.d.), Human Trafficking Task Force e-guide: Strengthening Collaborative Responses, Training & Tech. Assistance Ctr., [https:// www.ovcttac.gov/TaskForceGuide/EGuide/](https://www.ovcttac.gov/TaskForceGuide/EGuide/) (last visited Oct. 18, 2023) [hereinafter Task Force e-guide].

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.), Guidance to States and Services on Addressing Human Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States, Admin. for Children, Youth & Families, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/acyf_human_trafficking_guidance.pdf (last visited Oct. 18, 2023).

³ Task Force e-guide, *supra* note 1.

We are grateful for the Committee'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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