

February 25, 2020

The Honorable Josh Revak
Chair of Senate State Affairs
State Capitol, Room 125
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

The Honorable Zach Fields
Chair of House State Affairs
State Capitol, Room 412
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Subject: Support for SB 165 / HB 225

Dear Senator Revak and Representative Fields,

We are registered nurses who have spent the last four years serving survivors of sex trafficking in Anchorage and during this time we have learned much of the deleterious effects of life a victim of sex trafficking experiences. We are greatly encouraged by SB165/HB 225 as it addresses several important issues. It is imperative to offer justice and hope to those who are being exploited for the profit of others. Loopholes which have allowed traffickers and those who consume the sexual conduct of sex trafficking victims to escape accountability must be closed. This bill not only closes these loopholes, but at the same time, contains provisions to insulate victims of sex trafficking from unnecessary criminalization.

Our Anchorage based volunteer organization, Priceless, has served over 150 adult and juvenile survivors of sex trafficking. A team of mentors work with each survivor to help meet practical needs and navigate to necessary resources. As nurses, we actively provide education to local hospitals, clinics, and the UAA and Charter Schools of Nursing. Additionally, we have presented a community conference directed to health professionals and have produced an educational webinar, all with the goal of improving the ability to recognize trafficking victims and offer effective care.

Sex trafficking is a public health issue that demands a comprehensive and coordinated response. The survivors Priceless serves contend with many of the typical health problems seen in trafficking victims. While the extent of the injuries and illnesses victims

of sex trafficking suffer varies, survivors often report unspeakable cruelty, harsh physical, and devastating psychological treatment from their trafficker or the consumer of sex.

Physical health problems in trafficking victims encompass a wide range of problems. For example, is not uncommon to see problems from ~~issues such as~~ traumatic brain injuries, burns, strangulation, forced abortions, sexually transmitted, and other infections. Because healthcare may be sporadic or delayed, it is difficult to successfully resolve or manage many of a sex trafficking victim's health problems. This inadequate care often results in additional chronic issues making it more likely the individual will need extensive care and resources to recover from the physical effects of sex trafficking.

Although physical illness and injury are more readily observed, it is the trauma from psychological manipulation and emotional, physical, and sexual abuse which makes this a devastating life-long challenge. Sex trafficking victims attempt to cope with being psychologically manipulated, living in extreme fear, and feeling hopeless through various coping mechanisms, some of which are unhealthy. Victims may be tattooed to reflect the trafficker's "ownership," an enduring reminder that the victim has been treated as mere property. The effects of cumulative psychological trauma extend well beyond the time a victim is being trafficked and result in mental health disorders which present ongoing challenges. Victims have stated the psychological trauma is worse than the physical trauma.

We do have some concerns with the bill. Identifying the buyer of a victim of sex trafficking as a "patron" dignifies this crime. Use of the term patron incorrectly suggests a relationship with a legitimate business or organization. The preferred verbiage is consumer.

The bill includes a \$200 threshold for purposes of determining the class of felony for a person who assists in trafficking. Providing assistance with little obvious monetary

value, for example, providing a contact list, can have devastating consequences for victims and deliver enormous benefit to traffickers. Particularly when obtained by abusing the trust of a vulnerable person, assistance of this sort should be punished harshly, not excused because of the difficulty valuing the assistance provided. The bill should penalize assistance proportionate to the harm it can cause or the ways it could be leveraged by the trafficker.

Lasting physical and psychological traumas create a lifetime of issues for sex trafficking victims and present a significant public health issue. We appreciate your attention in promptly hearing this legislation and urge swift passage to hold sex traffickers and consumers of sex trafficking victims accountable, provide justice for, and hope to, those who will otherwise be further victimized.

Thank you,

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