

Greetings,

I am a PhD Candidate in Political Science at Northeastern University. I have worked in the anti-trafficking movement for over a decade, and my research explores how different institutional structures engage in anti-trafficking work. I have specifically examined how different definitions of human trafficking have been used by different organizations and some of the benefits and risks to different legal definitions of trafficking.

As such, I am calling today to ask the legislative members to vote yes Amendment #5 for HB 264. This amendment includes the federal criminal definition of sex trafficking of a minor, rather than the more inaccurate and misleading non-criminal definition.

As it stands now, the bill proposes a uniform screening tool that would count most homeless teens in Alaska as sex trafficking victims. Lumping most runaway youth together as victims of sex trafficking does not improve policy or programs for these youth, and actually obscures necessary information to understand how many people, particularly minors, are victims of force, fraud, or coercion within the sex industry. Widening definitions of trafficking like this to include people who have not been the victim of force, fraud, or coercion, as stated in the federal definition, makes it substantially harder for us to properly identify those who have.

This kind of broadened definition has also been used to target sex workers with felony charges just for working or living alongside homeless teens who can be mis-classified as sex trafficking victims under a law like this. Without Amendment #5, HB 264 makes sex workers, homeless and runaway youth, and sex trafficking victims less safe.

When we can distinguish between youth that are being trafficked and those engaging in survival sex, we can create evidence based policy and programs that are made to serve the needs of these very different groups. Please vote yes on Amendment #5 to use the federal criminal definition of sex trafficking of a minor. Thank you.

Tatiana Rothchild
PhD Candidate, Political Science, Northeastern University