



PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFETY & JUSTICE

**Submitted to the Senate Committee on Judiciary
March 30, 2021**

**Testimony in Support of SB 274
By Shannon Wight, Deputy Director on behalf of Partnership for Safety & Justice**

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chairs Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

At Partnership for Safety & Justice, we advocate for public safety and criminal justice policies that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both. For over 20 years, our work has promoted public safety with policies that keep families together, reduce racial disparities, and invest in communities across Oregon.

SB 274 proposes to end the criminalization of minors who have experienced sex trafficking. Removing the possibility that youth can be detained and charged with prostitution is an important step forward in making things right for victims and survivors, and in accurately identifying who victims are.

SB 274 also directs DHS to study and make recommendations for changes to state law regarding child abuse investigations of sex trafficking. This will be a step in the right direction given that families of color have historically experienced higher rates of foster care placements, sometimes resulting in greater vulnerability to the sex trade industry.

(<https://www.uclalawreview.org/racial-roots-human-trafficking/>)

The current system knowingly and willfully detains victims of a crime regardless of whether the district attorney's office intends to prosecute, which puts well-meaning officers and DHS workers in the position of not providing safety to sex trafficking survivors. By ending the criminalization of minors for prostitution, we can eliminate the possibility of this additional trauma for a young person who is already experiencing harm at the hands of the person who is controlling, coercing, and abusing them.

Partnership for Safety & Justice recently completed a report developed in partnership with survivors of color, *When We Tell Our Stories*: safetyandjustice.org/WhenWeTellOurStories. Key findings include that survivors of color overwhelmingly choose to not engage with the system, regardless of the level of danger they may be in. It also found that the criminal justice system prioritizes prosecution and incarceration over the needs of crime victims and survivors.

Although sex trafficking disproportionately harms Black and brown youth dating back to slavery in the US, communities of color know well from our history and from what they see each day that our public safety and welfare systems were not designed to protect them. And like most

harm that impacts people living in Black and brown bodies, those experiences often go undetected and unaddressed. We are still conditioned to first see Black and brown people as criminals and not people experiencing harm.

Survivors deserve care from people who look like them, sound like them or even share their experience. They deserve care from professionals in culturally specific settings whenever possible and from people who recognize the whole person and can address their trauma in a healing centered way.

SB 274 is an exemplary bill designed by community-based advocates and personally impacted people who know better than anyone what will work to address the complexity of sex trafficking. It was also designed with culture in mind, which is essential to healing.

We urge your support for SB 274.