

To: Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot 110 Measure Implementation

From: Sarah Cook, Domestic/Sexual Violence Advocate and Survivor

RE: SB 274: Protections for Sex Trafficked Minors

Thank you for reviewing this testimony in support of SB 274, a bill that would provide crucial protections for minors who are victims of sex trafficking.

As a domestic and sexual violence survivor and advocate in Multnomah County, I have personally experienced and witnessed the impact of legislature and systems that support victims and survivors instead of further traumatizing and victimizing them. One of the most common questions I hear from survivors who have lost autonomy and safety due to violence, including victims of sex trafficking, is, "Who will believe me?" Often, traffickers will tell victims that they will not get help from the criminal justice or social service systems because they are committing a crime. When faced with the possibility of detainment and prosecution for harm committed against them, victims' distrust and fear is exponentially amplified. SB 274 allows law enforcement to provide protective interventions for victims of sex trafficking and more efficiently focus on accountability for perpetrators and traffickers. By supporting SB 274, you not only attest to victims and survivors that you believe them, but you also work to increase necessary safety, trust, and autonomous decision-making for them to feel comfortable working with law enforcement to prosecute perpetrators of sex trafficking without fear of criminalization.

Additionally, SB 274 begins to address some of the disparities faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in victimization of, and prosecution for, sex trafficking crimes. Communities of color have historically carried the burden of oppression through systemic inequities in social services and criminal justice and have repeatedly expressed that supportive advocacy is more helpful in reducing these disparities than prosecuting victims of crimes, such as minors experiencing sex trafficking. Support of SB 274 indicates that you listen to the communities you represent, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who have historically been excluded from policy and legislative formation, and are committed to eliminating racial disparities in social service and criminal justice systems.

In the domestic and sexual violence advocacy community, we know that supportive, community-based advocacy is impactful in increasing victims' and survivors' safety, healing, and ability to work with law enforcement in prosecution of perpetrators of

violence. Trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and survivor-led services are the start of a solution to the issue of sex trafficking. We know that increasing autonomy and reducing barriers, such as those imposed by a criminal record for being a victim of sex crimes, is integral to long-term stabilization and community vitality. The services that effectively support domestic and sexual violence survivors serve as a model for supporting victims of sex trafficking. SB 274 allows Oregonians to invest in data-driven best practices and systems that work rather than perpetuate those that are ineffective and harmful. In order to successfully eliminate sex trafficking, the first step is ending criminalization for victims through SB 274 to encourage access to supportive services rather than punitive consequences for experiencing victimization.

I implore you to support SB 274 and affirm to victims of sex trafficking that you are committed to ending this form of criminalization and further traumatization in favor of a more supportive and comprehensive approach.

Thank you,

Sarah Cook
Domestic/Sexual Violence Advocate and Survivor