

Submitter: Simone Monaco  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure: SB473

Dear Chair Neron and the House Committee on Education,

My name is Simone Monaco and I am 18 years old. Until July of 2021, I lived in Oregon and now live in Florida.

I was lucky enough to grow up in Bend. One would never know that this little mountain town is a victim to human trafficking and a gateway to the larger cities of Portland and Seattle. My parents became aware of the issue when I was young after attending a Darkness to Light training to identify signs of child abuse. They soon became active with a local non-profit advocacy group called, In Our Backyard, whose goal is to raise awareness on human trafficking and volunteered at various events and fund-raisers.

As I matured, my parents taught me how to identify signs of potential predators. By the time I reached seventh grade and received my first iPhone, the reality of what could happen started to sink in. Especially after I read the non-fiction book, In Our Backyard by Nita Belles. Nita describes true stories of human trafficking based on her work leading an advocacy group of the same name. This book, although very upsetting, exposed to me a side of society that feels like it is out of movie rather than true stories. Despite the misconception that human trafficking only occurs in lower socioeconomic countries, it is a prevalent worldwide issue, even in my hometown.

For my fall English class project in 2020, I was tasked with researching a topic and creating a proposal that I felt could create a positive change for my community. My topic was the implementation of human trafficking awareness in Oregon schools. In my proposal I had two intentions. First, I researched and gave a background on human trafficking, specifically child sex trafficking and exploitation. My second goal was to suggest a curriculum for Oregon schools to help raise awareness and fight this issue.

After receiving positive feedback from my Professor, I decided to present it to my State Senator, Tim Knopp. Through all my research, I felt this topic presented through the voice of a teenager could make a more powerful statement. If real change was going to happen, a Bill had to be written so a program like this could be funded and implemented. In January, Senator Knopp let me know a Bill would be proposed. Although I have moved, I am so happy to see that SB 473 unanimously passed through the Senate, and now in the House.

While there is no one solution to the complex subject of human trafficking, youth education is a big step in the right direction. As a young adult, I believe human trafficking, especially child trafficking, needs to be addressed and exposed. In the past few years, the numbers have risen even more as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As my research and discussions with survivors and advocacy groups has shown, education is a very effective way to combat this growing issue.

Thank you for addressing this important issue.

Sincerely,  
Simone Monaco