

Submitter: Nita Belles  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure: SB473

Chair Neron, Vice Chair Hudson, members of the committee, thank you for hearing this bill. Thank you also for your work and sacrifices on behalf of the citizens of Oregon.

My name is Nita Belles, I'm the Founder and President of IN OUR BACKYARD, a national anti-trafficking nonprofit based in Oregon. I've been doing this work for 16 years. You may recognize our name because we are the folks who worked with the legislature to put these Freedom Stickers in restroom stalls throughout Oregon and now, they are nationwide.

This afternoon I would like to talk about the prevention and awareness aspects of SB 473 and what that means for Oregon. I personally cannot think of one other thing we could do today that would do more to prevent Oregon's children from being trafficked and give them the opportunity to live free, as well as creating appropriate awareness about this atrocity.

My colleagues have and will tell you that if this bill had been in place when they were growing up, they wouldn't have suffered the atrocities they have. But I'd like to address another aspect of the benefits of this bill.

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DHS has already been trained on human trafficking to appropriately work with victims referred to them. Recently the legislature passed SB 745 which mandates training of staff and screening for youth at a detention facility.

Those bills address the need for Oregon children who are in the system already. But what about the kids who are not in the system? Many of our youngest victims are actually trafficked by their parents for money or drugs. This bill will connect the dots and close the gap for children not in the system by training teachers, students, and parents about human trafficking. With this bill, we close the gap to protect all our children.

Additionally, not only will this bill prevent children from being trafficked, but because of that prevention, on a monetary level, it will save the state untold dollars by preventing children from needing the services of DHS, juvenile detention, and many other services. This is very significant!

Although it's impossible to predict how much money the implementation of this bill will save Oregon, a study done by the University of Minnesota in 2012 found "a positive

net value, or return on investment to the public sector, of at least 34:1 for early intervention with adolescent girls at risk of sex trafficking.” This means they found that for every dollar spent educating for prevention of trafficking, the public sector netted a \$34 return on investment!

That was in 2012 and I can imagine with inflation that number is incredibly higher. I can't begin to calculate that but I think we can all agree that will be a HUGE long term savings to Oregon, while protecting our children.

That is a remarkable amount of savings to the public sector, but if I'm a parent of even one of those children, that education represents the fact that my child will not be devastated by sex trafficking. There is no way to put a dollar amount on that.

And speaking of money, the good news is that this bill doesn't have a significant fiscal impact because IN OUR BACKYARD's Teens Against Trafficking program, which is already being used in several Oregon school districts is free to schools. IN OUR BACKYARD has funding to deliver this program.

In 2022, Oregon had 574,799 students enrolled in a total of 1,224 schools in 175 school districts. There were 29,379 teachers in the public schools. What this bill offers is that all those people and schools will be trained and equipped to help stop this atrocity for our children.

Finally, I am asking you today to vote to send this bill to the House Floor for a vote and save lives from being trafficked. We know the death rate is so high for trafficked individuals that you will actually be saving lives.

Thank you again for your time and consideration, please help save Oregon's children from trafficking by sending SB 473 for a House vote.