

Trafficking Law Center

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TO: House Education Committee

RE: Written testimony of Joel Shapiro, Executive Director of the Trafficking Law Center,
in support of SB 473

Chair Neron and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for holding a hearing on this significant bill, SB 473, which has the strong support of the Trafficking Law Center (TLC). TLC works to support human trafficking victims and survivors by providing *pro bono* legal services, training attorneys, and educating the public and policymakers on human trafficking issues.

Over the past two decades, policymakers at both the federal and state levels have gained increased knowledge of the problem of sex trafficking, particularly domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST). Unfortunately, there is still a great deal of misinformation about sex trafficking in the media, pop culture, and among the public generally.

This lack of awareness and understanding makes it more difficult to prevent sex trafficking. It is widely understood within the anti-trafficking movement, however, that education is one of the most important steps in reducing the recruitment of children into sex trafficking and in building a population with greater knowledge of sex trafficking indicators and red flags.

Oregon's first domestic sex trafficking statutes were enacted during the 2007 session, when the Legislature approved the Trafficking In Persons criminal statute as well as a sex trafficking civil claims statute. Following the initial recognition of this growing societal problem, the Oregon Legislature has continued to pass additional bills nearly every legislative session to strengthen Oregon's laws. Efforts to prevent sex trafficking were led initially by Representative Tomei and then by former Representative Huffman and Representative (now Senator) Taylor. Other House members, now in the Senate or retired, who've lead efforts to raise awareness and combat sex trafficking include former Reps Gelser Blouin, Knopp, Thatcher, Dembrow, Stark, and Leif. This measure's sponsor, Senator Hansell, has introduced a number of bills to combat sex trafficking, and we thank him for his leadership. With the influx of so many new House Members over the past two sessions, TLC appreciates the interest by many new Members in continuing to advance the fight to prevent victims from being recruited into sex trafficking.

Many of the bills passed since 2007 have strengthened Oregon's criminal laws. Efforts to establish sex trafficking curricula in Oregon schools, however, have come up short. Last month, Washington state passed a school curriculum bill this year (ESB 5355), and Oregon should keep pace with this advance. It's time for the Legislature to require that sex trafficking curricula be taught to all students in Oregon.

To provide some history on this topic, in 2015 and 2016, anti-trafficking activists held a series of meetings with the leadership of the Oregon Department of Education. During this process, the activists presented the Department with multiple examples of sex trafficking curricula that had been developed and implemented in other places. Despite encouraging statements that sex trafficking would be addressed in new standards adopted by the State Board of Education, activists were instead disappointed to learn that sex trafficking was not directly addressed in the new standards, which included only more general information on sexual and domestic violence.

Studies published by the U.S. Department of Justice, as well as first-hand knowledge from law enforcement and social service providers, substantiate that a very high percentage of sex trafficking victims are recruited as minors – many in their early teens. Most victims report that they did not even understand they were being trafficked until they were older and out of “the life.”

Evidence about the recruitment of sex trafficking victims, and evidence on the effectiveness of sex trafficking curricula where it has been implemented, makes clear that arming students with knowledge about what sex trafficking is and the common techniques traffickers use to recruit victims is the best method to help minors avoid being recruited into sex trafficking.

Enacting SB 473 would be a very important step in protecting Oregon’s students from the scourge of sex trafficking. The Trafficking Law Center strongly encourages the House Education Committee to approve SB 473 and send it to the House floor with a do-pass recommendation as soon as possible.