



There Is Hope For Me is a survivor-led 501c3 nonprofit organization functioning in Texas, Florida, and California. Everything we do is from survivors to survivors of human trafficking. We provide survivor-to-survivor peer support and programming centered around providing healing, opportunities for growth and development, and purpose by enabling survivors to become leaders and certified peer mentors and earn a living while becoming certified peer specialists. I am a survivor of sex and labor trafficking as well as forced child marriage.

Stop Human Trafficking in School Zones Act

During my 15+ years of doing school outreach and education on human trafficking, I have found that 1 in 3 middle schoolers and 1 in 9 high schoolers are currently being recruited online and in person through peer-to-peer recruitment. 5% of students in Texas have indicated family CARTEL involvement.

Suggested inclusion to the bill: Students deserve to have a fighting chance before being recruited or exploited. Schools across America should be required to give life-saving education to students and staff on proper identification in general ‘what is human trafficking’ and more specifically how to identify trafficking and recruitment in their own lives. A standardized school-based curriculum that is survivor-informed should also be mandated.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS TRAFFICKING VICTIMS’ PREVENTION AND PROTECTION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

It is recommended to modify the provision for grant access to make Access to Grants – EQUITABLE to survivors and survivor-led nonprofits, by removing the barrier of access to funding. Most survivors do not possess the grant writing skill or technological prowess necessary to navigate the federal funding system and may therefore become vulnerable to exploitive or tokenism practices.

Suggested New Bill: No Forced or Child Marriages in America Act

Another form of human trafficking is forced marriage. Forced marriage is considered **involuntary servitude** under the TVPA’s definition of human trafficking. “*condition of servitude induced by means of any scheme, plan, or pattern intended to cause a person to believe that, if the person did not enter into or continue in such condition, that person or another person would suffer serious harm or physical restraint; or the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process.*” Because forced marriage happens as a result of various threats, pressure, or coercion, where one or both participants do not and cannot consent, forced marriage is human trafficking. We need to do more to protect innocent children from this fate. Forced child marriages should never be allowed. Forced marriages of any kind, especially forced child marriages should be banned from happening in the United States. If anyone is benefiting from a US Citizenship as a result of their marriage this should be cause to question whether there is

some form of force, fraud, or coercion present and if someone is being victimized. By raising the legal age of marriage in every state to 18, prohibits traffickers and exploiters from coercing vulnerable young women into non-consensual marriages. In many of these marriages, including mine, marital rape, and abuse are present. Rape and abuse of a minor constitutes child abuse.

My Story: After I was trafficked in my middle school, I started dating the son of a Medellin Cartel member to get away from my traffickers. At 17, I was forced into marrying this man. Unbeknownst to me, his father was being indicted as one of the five cohorts named in the indictment against Pablo Escobar the leader of the Colombian Medellin Cartel. This marriage was used by him and his family to escape the fallout of his father's indictment. The exploitation occurred when I was coerced and threatened if I didn't marry him. The result was so that he and at least four of his cartel family members could obtain "unlawful" citizenship into the US. During my twenty-year abusive marriage to this man and his family, I had limited freedoms and lived as a slave to him. Even after starting a legitimate business with him, I worked for him for five years under abusive conditions and never once received financial compensation for my labor. After the divorce, I lost everything. Even my credit was exploited for his purposes until the Debt Bondage Relief Act. Getting involved with him and his family has been a 30-year nightmare for me where they have taken everything from me including the loss of my family and children. In order to live, I have had to ask for help from the FBI and had to relocate to another state to start over again. They do not just let you go; they want to make you suffer.

*As a Jewish woman and survivor of kidnapping and rape, I would like to show my solidarity for the people of Israel by condemning the rape and kidnapping of the Jewish women there on Oct. 7th. Thank you, Dr. Katariina Rosenblatt, PhD Executive Director of There Is Hope For Me, Inc.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE ON FORCED CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

There is No Federal Law that addresses this issue. However, in 2022, the ILO reported there were 22,000,000 people in forced marriages worldwide (Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor and Forced Marriage International Labor Organization (ILO), Walk Free, and International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva, 2022, 2023). Forced marriage violates The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and The Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Connecticut: In 2023 Passed HB6569 Sponsored by Rep. Jillian Gilchrest. Result: No child marriage under 18. **Delaware:** In 2018 Passed HB 377 Sponsored by Rep. Kim Williams. Result: No child marriage under 18. **Michigan:** In 2023 Passed SB 209, 212, 213 and 216/HB 4924-4296 Sponsored by Sen. Sarah Anthony & Rep. Kara Hope. Result: No Child Marriage under 18. **Minnesota:** In 2020 Passed SF1393/HF745 Sponsored by Sen. Sandy Pappas & Rep. Kaohly Her. Result: No Child Marriage under 18. **New Jersey:** In 2018 Passed A865/S427 Sponsored by Sen. Nellie Pou & Asm. Nancy Munoz. Result: No child marriage under 18. **New York:** In 2021 Passed A3891/S3086 Sponsored by Rep. Phil Ramos & Sen. Julia Salazar. Result: No Child Marriage under 18. **Pennsylvania:** In 2019, Passed HB360/SB81 Sponsored by Rep. Warren, Rep. Topper, Sen. Sabatina, Sen. Schwank, and Sen. Langerholc. Result: No Child Marriage under 18. **Rhode Island:** In 2021 Passed H5387/S398 Sponsored by Rep. Julie Casimiro & Sen. John Burke. Result: No Child Marriage under 18. **Vermont:** In 2023, Passed H148 Sponsored by Rep. Carole Ode. Result: No Child Marriage under 18. **Virginia:** In 2024 Del. Karen Keyes-Gamarra introduced HB 994 No Child Marriage under age 18, without exception. Pending in the legislature.