



April 11, 2023

RE: SUPPORT for Bills LD 1435, An Act to Reduce Commercial Sexual Exploitation, and LD 1436 An Act to Provide Remedies for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for hearing testimony on these important bills. On behalf of [Polaris](#), a national nonprofit organization with more than 20 years of experience combating sex and labor trafficking and operators of the [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#),¹ I am writing to express our strong support for LD 1435 and LD 1436 and the positive impact they will have to support survivors of human trafficking and reduce future exploitation. Based on our experience working with thousands of trafficking victims, these bills address significant pieces of how sex trafficking works in states like Maine. More than [300 victims](#) of human trafficking have been identified in Maine through the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Across the nation, people in vulnerable situations are the most likely to experience prostitution and sex trafficking. Polaris recently conducted a [National Survivor Study](#) of over 450 trafficking survivors, finding that prior to their trafficking experience, 83 percent of survivors experienced poverty, 96% experienced physical abuse, and 93% experienced substance abuse and mental health challenges.

When it comes to being criminalized, 65 percent of sex trafficking survivors reported being cited, detained, or arrested by law enforcement. Most of those survivors arrested (82 percent) were arrested, detained, or cited during their trafficking situation. Of those arrested, 72 percent had criminal records that resulted from the original citation, detention, or arrest. This led to a majority of sex trafficking survivors who had been arrested (89 percent) reporting that all or at least some of their criminal record was related to their trafficking victimization.

Traffickers use the threat of arrest against victims in order to coerce them into continuing commercial sex. Traffickers also know that convictions for prostitution limit a victim's ability to leave, as housing and jobs become more limited. Once a survivor escapes a trafficking situation, these convictions then continue to impact their stability, with social services, places to live, places to work, and even custody of their children affected by their prostitution convictions that occurred while being trafficked.

On the opposite side, the men buying sex from trafficking victims are rarely if ever held accountable for the trauma and violence they cause. The money that buyers pay for sex becomes a constant motive for traffickers to find new victims and use violence to keep them under control. Clearer definitions and penalties like those in LD 1435 regarding a buyer's role in commercial sexual exploitation will allow law enforcement to focus on the source of financial motivation for sex trafficking, the buyers, as well identifying both the trafficker *and* the sex buyer as perpetrators of harm.

¹ The National Human Trafficking Hotline is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$4.5 million annually with 78% percentage funded by ACF/HHS and \$1.3 million and 22% percentage funded by non-government source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF website, Administrative and National Policy Requirements: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/administrative-and-national-policy-requirements#chapter-8>.



We believe the approach put forward in LDs 1435 and 1436 will help protect vulnerable people from being criminalized for their own exploitation, will give them the chance to move forward with their lives again, and will deter exploitation of others by holding sex buyers accountable for commercial sexual exploitation. Please vote “ought to pass” on LDs 1435 and 1436.

Sincerely,

Robert J Beiser

Robert Beiser
Director of the Strategic Initiative on Sex Trafficking
Polaris