



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony
In Support of

LD 1695 An Act to Provide Law Enforcement Agencies with an Anti-sex-trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Protocol

Good Afternoon Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Amy Arata and I represent House District 104, which includes New Gloucester and part of Gray. It is my privilege to introduce LD 1695 ***An Act to Provide Law Enforcement Agencies with an Anti-sex-trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Protocol***.

Sex trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery, and it's a serious problem in Maine. This became painfully clear to me on November 8 of last year, when I was notified that a man I had rented a retail space to had been arrested for sex trafficking at another location. This man and his wife of many years were respected professionals in the community, had an established real estate agent, had excellent credit, and had over a million dollars in home equity. He said he was renting the space for a business that would use a unique Chinese-made machine to do therapeutic scalp and neck massages. He had a Chinese business partner who didn't have any credit history in the United States, but people have foreign investors all the time, so I didn't suspect a thing. I have been screening tenants for 17 years and I have always been able to figure out if someone was lying to me. It turned out that he owned another massage parlor nearby and it was actually a brothel. This prostitution business was so busy that he wanted to expand into another location, and I fell for his lies.

Thankfully, the police alerted me to the truth about my new tenant before he ever had a chance to open. I found out that in the weeks since I gave him the keys, he had Chinese laborers building walls for private rooms in the space without my permission or legal permits. They spoke no English and were starting to tamper with the electrical and heating systems. They're lucky that they didn't hurt themselves. I don't know if these men were also being trafficked or if they were perpetrators. The women who were being trafficked at the other location were also Chinese and spoke no English. Can you imagine the terror and despair of being in a strange new country where the only people you know are those who are selling your body to strangers, you're completely dependent on them, and you can't speak the language to ask anybody for help? No, these women shouldn't be in jail, but there should have been a way to help them when there was an opportunity. Now, we don't even know if they're still alive.

There have recently been multiple reports in the news about sex trafficking occurring all over Maine, but few convictions. If law enforcement could help those who are being trafficked, it will also help them convict the

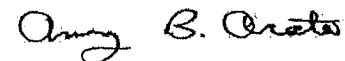
enslavers. As a legislator, now that I know about this problem, I have an obligation to try to fix it. I contacted the police for advice, which lead me to contact Assistant District Attorney Walsh. He suggested some possible legislation, which lead to this bill.

The language in this bill was taken word-for-word from former Representative Lois Reckitt's LD 1435, *An Act to Reduce Sexual Exploitation*, which decriminalized prostitution. LD 1435 was heard by the Judiciary Committee, but this segment was amended out of the final bill that was voted into law. It is not clear why this occurred, but perhaps it was due to a potential fiscal note. The bill I am presenting today, LD 1695, can be implemented using existing resources.

I have been notified that Commissioner Sauschuck will testify neither for nor against this bill. As I understand, his concern is that rather than a "protocol" being established in the manner prescribed in this bill, that a "minimum policy standard" should be established by the Maine Criminal Justice Academy Board of Trustees. My goal for this legislation is not to burden law enforcement with another mandate. Rather, it is to provide them with additional tools for when they encounter people ensnared in the dangerous and tragic circumstance of human trafficking. I do not presume to tell law enforcement how to do their job, and I am happy to work with the department on an amendment that satisfies any concerns.

Thank you for your consideration and I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy B. Arata".

Amy Arata
State Representative