



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1440  
TTY: (207) 287-4469

## Reagan L. Paul

PO Box 165  
Winterport, ME 04496  
Reagan.Paul@legislature.maine.gov  
Cell: (207) 944-8033

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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Reagan Paul, and I am honored to represent House District 37. Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 1877, "*An Act to Increase Penalties for Human Trafficking Offenses.*" This legislation is designed to move Maine toward a more effective and compassionate response to one of the most egregious crimes in our society—human trafficking—and to position our state as a leader in preventing the exploitation of its people.

LD 1877 includes several key reforms: strengthening penalties for sex trafficking and aggravated sex trafficking, mandating restitution for victims, and updating training requirements for frontline professionals who are most likely to encounter victims. These reforms are not only necessary—they are long overdue.

But the *why* behind this bill is paramount. Traffickers must come to fear the State of Maine. They must understand that we do not take the victimization of our people lightly. This bill is a step forward—a deliberate move to ensure that every man, woman, or child who falls victim to this heinous crime has the opportunity for some sense of justice, while those who prey on them are held to account. Deterrence is an essential tool in the prevention of crime, and Maine can and should improve its stance on this abhorrent practice.

If LD 1877 prevents even *one* Mainer from being trafficked, it will have been worth it.

Although it may not be a popular topic of conversation, the ugly truth is that human trafficking is not just a global or national problem—it is happening right here in our communities. In 2023, the National Human Trafficking Hotline documented 36 cases involving 78 victims in Maine. But advocates, including the Maine Sex Trafficking and Exploitation Network, estimate the real number to be much higher—between 300 and 400 victims annually.

These are not just statistics. They represent Maine children being targeted online. Maine women coerced into sexual slavery. Vulnerable youth—especially those in foster care—trapped in cycles of exploitation. Traffickers exploit every corner of our state, both rural and urban, taking advantage of geographic isolation, economic disparity, and limited law enforcement capacity.

Our criminal justice system's response has been inadequate. In 2023, only four individuals were charged with sex trafficking in Maine—just two were convicted. One aggravated case was dismissed entirely. Of 41 individuals charged with engaging a prostitute, only three were convicted, serving a mere seven days in jail. Twenty-five cases were dismissed outright. Survivors—many of them children—see their traffickers walk free or receive minimal consequences. This is unacceptable.

Consider a high-profile case from 2023: a man from Boston trafficked a young woman into Maine through force and coercion. A conviction—and a 30-year sentence—was only secured because of a federal investigation. Without federal intervention, justice might never have been served.

I bring this information not to tackle underlying issues or shortcomings within our justice system today—that is a broader conversation for another time and for another branch of government. Rather, I present it to underscore a hard truth: Maine people are suffering, and we have the power—and the responsibility—to act.

Nationally, trafficking is on the rise. In 2022 alone, 1,912 individuals were referred to federal prosecutors for trafficking—a 26% increase over the past decade. Most traffickers—91%—are men. Nearly all—95%—are U.S. citizens. The average age of entry into commercial sexual exploitation is just 12 to 14 years old. Globally, children account for 38% of all known victims.

The consequences are devastating. Among survivors, 88% experience PTSD, 76% report suicidal thoughts, and 68% suffer long-term cognitive impacts. These are not distant tragedies—they reflect the lived experiences of victims right here in Maine.

LD 1877 offers a real opportunity to change that.

Before diving further into the bill's content, I want to acknowledge the ongoing debate around mandatory minimum sentencing. As currently written, the bill includes mandatory minimums for trafficking offenses. I recognize there are valid arguments on both sides of this issue. But, in the interest of respecting the political realities surrounding this topic and not wanting perfect to be the enemy of the good, I wanted to convey to the committee that I am willing to consider amending the bill to remove the mandatory minimum provisions.

This flexibility reflects my belief that the core components of this legislation are critical to public safety. Removing mandatory minimums from this bill would shift the focus to enhanced sentencing options for trafficking offenses that occur near sensitive areas like schools, shelters, and youth programs. Judges would retain discretion while still imposing meaningful consequences—a common-sense reform that prioritizes protection and deterrence.

With that in mind, I urge the committee to preserve the provision increasing penalties for trafficking on the premises of or within 1,000 feet of locations like schools and childcare facilities. These are places where victims—particularly children—are most vulnerable.

The bill also strengthens financial accountability. It increases restitution for victims and requires greater contributions to the Victims' Compensation Fund. Other testifiers will speak more to why this is essential, but let me be clear: financial restitution is part of justice, and survivors deserve meaningful support.

District 37      Frankfort, Prospect, Searsport, Stockton Springs and Winterport

LD 1877 further requires electronic monitoring of convicted traffickers where available. This is not a novel idea—it is a proven one. A 2012 California pilot study found that monitored offenders had a reoffense rate roughly 10% lower than those without monitoring. In New Jersey, studies between 2013 and 2015 showed that high-risk sex offenders under GPS monitoring had a 3.9% recidivism rate for new sex crimes, compared to 6.5% for unmonitored individuals. These results matter. They translate into fewer victims.

As drafted, the bill also mandates trafficking awareness training for certain professionals. However, after further consultation with experts, I propose a more targeted approach by instead amending the bill to update Maine's existing training requirements for mandatory reporters to include human trafficking awareness. This ensures that educators, healthcare workers, and others who are most likely to encounter victims receive up-to-date, practical training—without creating redundant mandates.

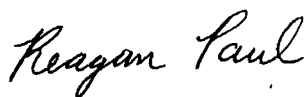
Globally, human trafficking generates over \$150 billion annually—second only to drug trafficking. Traffickers are drawn to states with weak laws, light sentencing, and little risk. LD 1877, with the proposed amendments, would increase the risk to traffickers without undermining judicial discretion. It strengthens Maine's legal framework and sends a clear message: we will not be a safe haven for predators.

When a survivor walks into a Maine courtroom, they should feel seen, protected, and supported. This bill moves us toward that reality. It is thoughtful, targeted legislation that balances justice, safety, and rehabilitation.

LD 1877 makes Maine stronger. It gives victims a path toward healing, holds offenders accountable, and empowers our communities to prevent future exploitation.

I urge you to support this bill and reaffirm Maine's commitment to protecting its most vulnerable citizens—with compassion, with courage, and with integrity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Reagan Paul  
State Representative