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**Testimony Supporting House Bill 165 with Amendments
March 23, 2022**

The Sexual Assault/Spouse Abuse Resource Center (SARC) is a non-profit organization in Harford County, Maryland that serves victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, and human trafficking. SARC is a comprehensive victim service provider and urges the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee to issue a favorable report with amendments to HB165.

House Bill 165: Sexual Abuse & Assault Awareness and Prevention Program, Human and Sex Trafficking would require the State Board of Education and certain nonpublic schools to develop and implement a program of age-appropriate education on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault and human trafficking. This prevention program would be given in the already existing health courses for 6th to 8th graders. The average age of victimization for human trafficking is 13 years old, so educating our children on warning signs and prevention techniques is crucial during this age period. These educators could also be a point of access for help for anyone who is being abused or exploited.

SARC believes that this type of crucial education and prevention should not end in 8th grade but should continue until 12th grade. Human Trafficking is an ever-evolving topic, statistics, best practices, and red flags can change with more evidence-based research. SARC and other local victim service agencies would be a resource to assist schools in developing this program.

SARC believes that HB165 is an important piece of the overall prevention initiative within our communities' and that educating children at school is a critical component to ending sex trafficking. **The Sexual Assault/Spouse Abuse Resource Center urges the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee to report favorably on House Bill 165.**