

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

BILL NO: Senate Bill 862
TITLE: Public Health – Pregnancy – Coercion (Protecting Pregnant Women Against Coercive Abuse and Human Trafficking)
COMMITTEE: Finance
HEARING DATE: March 13, 2024
POSITION: **UNFAVORABLE**

[The Human Trafficking Prevention Project](#) (“HTPP”) strongly opposes Senate Bill 862, as it is clearly being used to advance a political viewpoint under the pretense of caring for women experiencing one form of reproductive coercion, but disregarding other, more common forms of this behavior. Furthermore, it is an attack on women’s reproductive autonomy executed largely under the guise of improving the protections available to survivors of human trafficking.

The HTPP has assisted hundreds of survivors of human trafficking since its inception in 2015, and reproductive coercion is often a part of the dynamic of power and control being exercised over our clients by their traffickers and/or abusive partners. However, unlike the actions addressed in SB 862, we see reproductive coercion far more often in the form of a victim’s trafficker refusing to wear a condom or forcing his victim to engage in a sex act in which she does not want to participate. While we have indeed encountered instances where a trafficking victim was forced to have an abortion, it is far more common for traffickers to coerce their victims into having children with them through false promises of wanting to “start a family” with them, knowing full well that, in reality, it is often financially *and* legally impossible to get away from someone with whom you share children. Additionally, threats to harm or kidnap the child provide a terrifying new tactic for keeping the victim compliant.

The “Whereas” clauses of this bill, ironically couched in terms of freedom of choice for women,¹ make it starkly plain this is simply an anti-abortion bill “dressed up” as a false attempt to assist vulnerable women. What’s worse is that it seeks to exploit the trauma of those already facing exploitation to do it.

The Human Trafficking Prevention Project strongly believes that access to safe, legal, self-determined reproductive care that includes abortion is foundational to ending sexual harm, including sex trafficking, and is essential for the health and well-being of all women in Maryland. We therefore strongly urge an unfavorable vote on Senate Bill 862.

The Human Trafficking Prevention Project is dedicated to ending the criminalization of sex workers and survivors of human trafficking through access to civil legal services and support for policies that dismantle harmful systems and increase access to basic human rights and legal relief.

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¹ See p. 1, lines 21-26, and p.2, lines 1-9.