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Proponent: SB 497

Testimony for Senate - Scheduled Hearing in Judiciary: Wednesday, 2/16, 10:30 AM

Greetings, and thank you for the opportunity to be with you today.

The importance of today's hearing on SB 497 cannot be overstated. Its fate determines the fates of hundreds, maybe thousands, of lives in the state of Kansas. As a human rights lawyer and justice advocate, I've spent the last twenty plus years helping communities end and prevent human trafficking – all around the world, across the United States, and throughout the state of Kansas too. What I know to be true is that human trafficking is happening in nearly every community in our nation today. Kansas is no exception. It is a known fact that both labor and sex trafficking, of adults and minors, foreign nationals and citizens, are occurring in communities across Kansas. Urban, rural, large, and small. No community is immune.

It is also true that all those in a position to recognize and respond to human trafficking have not yet received the training they need to identify, intervene, and even prevent these grievous crimes. That's why this bill is critical. Its passage will save lives. If it fails to pass, lives will be lost.

Creating a law in the state of Kansas that mandates key community stakeholders receive training on human trafficking will increase identifications, care, and outcomes for survivors. I have seen it happen time and again. And the key professions that need to receive training in every community include at a minimum: Educators & School Personnel; Behavioral Health Providers; Healthcare Professionals; Group Home Professionals; Foster Care & Adoptive Families & Associations; Juvenile Justice Professionals; Community Advocates & Organizations; Case Managers & all those working in Child Welfare.

Each of these individuals in your communities are uniquely positioned to recognize human trafficking indicators, and they will often need each other to successfully respond. Mandatory trainings help then to create both a systemic and system-wide approach to addressing human trafficking – in your local communities and across the state. And given that these professions especially experience high turnover rates, mandatory training will make sure that the next professional to carry the baton forward doesn't miss a beat in knowing what they need to know to keep individuals safe.

From my seat, this bill should be the easiest yes on your docket today. Human trafficking knows no bounds. It is often hidden in plain sight. It is many times the culmination of compounding vulnerabilities in an individual's life. And its presence in your communities is the worst of consequences of many issues that need to be better addressed. But that work begins by equipping those in a position to see it. So pass this bill. Mandate these trainings. And make sure that those in need of the trainings have the resources available to implement it. Thank you.