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Testimony in support of Senate Bill 497

**Presented to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
By Michelle McCormick, Director of Victim Services
Office of the Attorney General**

February 16, 2022

Chair Warren and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 497. My name is Michelle McCormick and I am the director of victim services and state victim rights coordinator for Attorney General Derek Schmidt. In this capacity, I also serve on the state anti-human trafficking advisory board as the chair of the victim services subcommittee. Prior to this role I worked at a private non-profit organization that provided direct services to victims of human trafficking, where my colleagues and I served hundreds of exploited sex trafficking victims in Topeka.

The state of Kansas has made tremendous progress in the last decade in creating stronger laws and coordinated responses to better intervene in ending human trafficking. However, our work is not done. Vulnerable Kansans, both youth and adults, continue to experience the exploitation of labor and sex trafficking in our urban and rural communities.

One of the challenges in creating stronger responses to human trafficking is that this issue is underreported and there is a lack of consistent, evidence-based training for professionals who may have the opportunity to identify when trafficking may be occurring. The topic of human trafficking has at times captured the attention of the public, but there has unfortunately been a problem with misinformation and a lack of common understanding about what human trafficking actually looks like in Kansas. Though there have been significant efforts to provide training on human trafficking identification in some communities and in some areas of practice, there has not been a coordinated structure across disciplines.

Experts in the field of human trafficking have determined that a multidisciplinary response where professionals in law enforcement, child welfare, the health care field, social services, and others are trained in a common understanding of the red flag indicators of human trafficking is the most effective way to begin an effective intervention. The Office of the Attorney General has spent the last 10 years providing training on human trafficking identification and investigation to law enforcement and victim service providers. Based on the recommendations of Shared Hope International, a national group that evaluates states' responses to human trafficking, and the

National Advisory Council on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States (NAC), the Office of the Attorney General is recommending that you pass this law, which will require a minimum amount of training for key partners for a multidisciplinary response.

The Office of the Attorney General coordinates the state anti-human trafficking advisory board and through the work of this multidisciplinary group, believes that we can work with the appropriate state agencies to coordinate this effort, so that the identified professionals can receive consistent and standardized training on this critical topic. SB 497 focuses on the professionals who are already deemed mandatory reporters, as human trafficking is a form of child abuse. This one-hour annual training requirement will arm Kansas mandatory reporters with the information they need to report with confidence.

I received my first training on the issue of human trafficking 10 years ago. Prior to that, I would have likely told you that human trafficking does not happen here and was a social problem that plagues foreign countries. By receiving training from the Office of the Attorney General, my professional blinders were removed and my commitment to ending the exploitation for victims right here at home was solidified.

To have the most effective response to human trafficking statewide, we have to create a shared understanding of human trafficking indicators, the risk factors for victimization, and the knowledge of how to report these concerns, which is why we ask for your support of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information with the Committee.

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