



Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide non-profit focused on improving the lives and experiences of Maryland's children through policy change and program improvement. We champion solutions to child welfare, education, health, and juvenile justice issues, positioning us to influence the full spectrum of youth experiences. This multi-issue platform helps us to improve the entirety of children's worlds—the systems they touch, the people they interact with, and the environment where they live.

Testimony before the Judicial Proceedings Committee

In SUPPORT of

Senate Bill 308- Child Abuse – Sex Trafficking (Protecting Victims of Sex Trafficking Act of 2017)

**Melissa Rock, Child Welfare Director, Advocates for Children and Youth
February 9, 2017**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 308- Child Abuse – Sex Trafficking (Protecting Victims of Sex Trafficking Act of 2017). Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

Human Trafficking is such a serious problem in Maryland that there are statewide as well as local task forces all across Maryland studying what we can do to prevent it from occurring as well as helping the victims when it does occur. Youth in Maryland are at an even higher risk of becoming a victim of sex trafficking than many other places because of our proximity to the I-95 corridor. In 2014, according to the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force, "396 survivors of Human Trafficking were identified and provided assistance in Maryland."¹ At least 124 of those survivors were under 18 (175 of them did not report their age).² The final report of Maryland's Safe Harbor Workgroup, which was focused on studying child victims of sex trafficking indicates that while only 18 youth were identified as having been a victim of sex trafficking in 2013, there were 87 youth in the first nine months of 2016.³

Currently, sex trafficking victims aren't under the purview of what a Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) office can investigate because sex trafficking is not included in the definitions of child sexual abuse (often the trafficker is not a parent or guardian, as required by our current statutes). SB 308 closes this gap by adding sex trafficking to our definitions of sexual abuse of a child. This is a critical step we need to take to be able to help these vulnerable youth and to bring us into compliance with federal requirements. Including sex trafficking in our definition of child sexual abuse was one of the ten recommendations from Maryland's Safe Harbor Workgroup.

We urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 308 to ensure that child victims of sex trafficking can receive the services they desperately need through their Local Departments of Social Services.

¹ <http://www.mdhumantrafficking.org/>

² Maryland Safe Harbor Workgroup, 2016 Final Report, (December 1, 2016), p. 6. Report can be found here: <https://goccp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/safe-harbor-workgroup-final-report-2016.pdf>

³ Id. at 10.

