

In support of HB 7399 - An Act Concerning Legal Protections For The Victims of Human Trafficking And The Protection of Minors From Cyber Exploitation

Dr. Asher Marks

Judiciary Committee, April 1, 2019

Distinguished members of the Judicial Committee, my name is Asher Marks and I am an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the Yale University School of Medicine and a practicing pediatrician at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital. I am writing to you in support of HB 7399, An Act Concerning Privileged Communication Made by Victims of Human Trafficking to a Human Trafficking Counselor.

As a pediatrician, I have witnessed first-hand the impact that trauma has on a child's physical and mental well-being. As scientific research continues to demonstrate, adolescents are not merely young adults. Adolescence is a critical developmental period for children during which time their brains are continuing to develop, and the cerebral cortex, which is responsible for rational thought, is not fully developed. As a result, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the predatory tactics of traffickers. Once identified as victims, these children require significant services in order to address their complex needs.

This bill does a number of important things to help our state better meet the needs of child trafficking victims while also mitigating the potential trauma and revictimization that can be caused by the criminal justice system. In particular, this bill:

- Enables children to meet with counselors and disclose all of the facts, memories, thoughts, and feelings of their victimization without concern for disclosure;
- Clarifies that juveniles can be afforded immunity in delinquency proceedings;
- Provides for affirmative defense to help mitigate the harsh and punitive nature of the criminal justice system; and
- Expands the law to cover internet based exploitation.

I hope that the committee will see the importance of strengthening the legislative protections for victims of child trafficking and support HB 7399.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Asher Marks, MD