



**HB0575 Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program –
Human and Sex Trafficking**

Presented to the Honorable Anne Kaiser and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee
February 13, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the House Ways and Means Committee to issue **a favorable report on HB0575 Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking**, sponsored by Delegate Steve Johnson.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We strive to ensure every individual has the freedom to decide to when, how, and with whom to engage in sexual relations. This freedom relies on respecting the sexual agency and bodily autonomy of every individual. Everyone has the right to an education about healthy and consensual sexual interactions, and it is also in the best interests of youth to have access to evidenced-based health education curriculum about the scope and nature of sex crimes. Accordingly, we support age appropriate education relating to the prevention and awareness of sexual abuse and assault, as well as human and sex trafficking to ensure the sexual health and well-being of young people.

HB0575 would change the way Maryland schools approach sex education to include information that would teach young people the difference between healthy sexual interactions and those that are founded in assault, abuse, and exploitation. Even though our schools have sex education, there is a difference between knowing about various forms of sexual expression and knowing which are considered harmful and illegal.

It is imperative that state's sex education curriculum includes information that will help protect all young people. In Maryland, only twelve percent of sexual assaults against children are reported each year, and youth advocates are concerned that this low percentage stems from guilt and confusion about the assault. Young people do not always understand that what happened to them is abuse. Seventy percent of sexual assault and violence occurs before an individual is eighteen years oldⁱ which means that most sexual assault cases occur during the time that our young people are in elementary or secondary school. There is a need to educate our youth in issues that are relevant to them.

Maryland is attractive to traffickers because I-95 and I-70 allow quick transportation along with access to three major airports including BWI.ⁱⁱ In 2015, Governor Larry Hogan made a statement to prioritize addressing trafficking crime in Maryland, stating that "forcing a young girl or boy into prostitution ... is unconscionable and unacceptable, and it must be stopped."ⁱⁱⁱ Young people need to be aware of the potential threats they face

every day, HB0575 would give an opportunity for schools to educate those young people on the issues that affect them directly.

In Maryland forty four percent of women and more than twenty three percent of men have experienced some sort of sexual violence.^{iv} These assaults result in hospitalization, government spending, and therapy. This is a rising epidemic that begins with our youth and continues into adulthood. Schools serve the purpose of educating the public, and right now the issue of sexual assault and trafficking are an immediate risk to public health and safety. If we implement a curriculum that discusses these risks, our communities will benefit both socially and economically.

One recommendation our organization does have it that there is often confusion about sex trafficking and forced marriage, and we strongly believe that lesson plans about forced marriage should also be included in the curriculum, as the two issues are routinely conflated. Although young people are not being forced into marriage against their will to be trafficked by family members, forced marriage – which occurs among both juveniles and adults – is domestic violence, with the goal of the parent or legal guardian gaining economic or social benefits from exploiting their own children. The curriculum should include ways that young people can seek intervention before the marriage takes place – such as knowing that there are resources for emergency shelter and case management, including legal advocacy to stop the marriage from occurring or legal relief in order to end the marriage contract if the forced marriage occurs.

Educating our young people on these issues will allow them to better understand these issues, learn how to seek help if needed, and prevent sexual violence in their futures. School curriculum dedicated to these issues can help lower the statistics or they will continue to rise leaving our young people uneducated, vulnerable, and susceptible to unhealthy relationships and exploitation. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on bill HB0575**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ “Statistics: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault.” MCASA. Accessed February 8, 2020. <https://mcasa.org/stats-info/statistics> .

ⁱⁱ “Human Trafficking.” Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services. Accessed February 7, 2020. <http://goccp.maryland.gov/victims/rights-resources/human-trafficking/> .

ⁱⁱⁱ “Fourth Annual Human Trafficking Conference To Be Held May 28.” Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services, March 19, 2016. <http://goccp.maryland.gov/fourth-annual-human-trafficking-conference-to-be-held-may-28/> .

^{iv} “Sexual Assault in Maryland.” MCASA. Accessed February 6, 2020. <https://mcasa.org/stats-info/statistics> .