



STATE SENATOR

Eric Wimberger

DISTRICT 30

State Senator Eric Wimberger

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Re: creation of a Human Trafficking Council and requiring the establishment of county sex trafficking task forces.

Thank you Senator Wanggaard and committee members for holding a hearing today on Senate Bill 954 which establishes a Human Trafficking Council and tasks this Council with creating and maintaining an online database to share information about human trafficking.

While even a single instance of human trafficking is too much, this crime has been seen in all 72 counties of our state and has reached crisis levels. Since the creation of the National Human Trafficking Hotline, 796 cases of human trafficking have been identified in Wisconsin and 1,640 victims were identified in those cases.

In my conversations with Rep. O'Connor about his experience as the Chair of the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking, he explained that one of the most challenging issues faced by those working to end human trafficking is the lack of data on the extent of sex trafficking activities in Wisconsin. This is a problem that Senate Bill 954 aims to fix.

This legislation creates a Human Trafficking Council, made up of subject matter experts from the Departments of Children and Families, Public Instruction, and Transportation, along with designees from various law enforcement and victim support groups. This Council will have four years to compile an inventory of human trafficking prevention programs and services and maintain an online database. The Council also must assess sex trafficking activities in each county, and determine whether a county is experiencing above-average sex trafficking activities. If a county is determined to have above-average sex trafficking activities, that county is encouraged to establish its own sex trafficking task force to combat sex trafficking in that county.

I want to thank Rep. O'Connor, Rep. Scott Johnson, and the rest of the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking for their hard work in tackling this important issue. I think Senate Bill 954, along with the other legislation introduced as a result of the Speakers Task Force on Human Trafficking, is an important first step in ending human trafficking in Wisconsin.

State Capitol • PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882
(608) 266-5670 • (800) 385-3385
Sen.Wimberger@legis.wi.gov



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

Testimony for the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Senate Bill 954 Establish a Human Trafficking Council Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Thank you to the Committee Chair and committee members for allowing us this opportunity to address the background of this bill.

Human trafficking is a global crisis. It affects countless lives, including many individuals right here in Wisconsin. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, since the program's inception in 2007, Wisconsin has had 796 human-trafficking cases involving 1,640 victims. While those statistics are striking, a 2019 DOJ study found that sex-trafficking data is under-reported, so the true number of victims is likely much higher.

As Chair of the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking, I would like to share a few thoughts on this bill. This bill is a product of the hearings held during the past four months where our Human Trafficking Task Force attempted to better understand how trafficking is affecting our society, especially young people. We learned from agency representatives, DOJ, County DA offices, multiple speakers from local law enforcement, and not-for-profit victim support organizations what a challenge it is to turn the tide of human trafficking in Wisconsin.

This exercise gave us a clear pathway to several bills we could introduce that would have an effective influence and help reduce the level of sex and child sex trafficking in Wisconsin. This is one of those bills and the Task Force recommends it for passage.

Establish a Human Trafficking Council:

Time and time again throughout the course of our hearings, we heard that there was not a central database or platform for sharing critical information that could benefit communication and awareness of human trafficking between agencies, law enforcement, and victim support organizations. A side effect of this status is that we do not have a clear handle on the activities related to trafficking that would allow us to better understand and target our efforts to turn the tide of trafficking in Wisconsin.

This bill would create a statewide Human Trafficking Council that brings together the key stakeholders of agency, law enforcement, and victim representation. If we are to better utilize our various resources then we need to access the data that will allow us to maximize our effectiveness in overcoming this challenge.

Rep. Jerry O'Connor
(608) 267-9152
Rep.O'Connor@legis.wisconsin.gov

This data will help facilitate the other activities assigned to the Council. The duties of the Human Trafficking Council are to:

- compile an inventory of human trafficking prevention programs and services
- maintain an online database to share information about human trafficking
- review and assess the efficacy of the expenditure of state funds for human trafficking prevention
- compile and analyze data about human trafficking arrests and prosecutions
- assess sex trafficking activities in each county, and track averages across counties
- determine whether a county is experiencing above-average sex trafficking activities
- assess the regulation and oversight of facilities that provide residential care in a congregate living environment
- assess the use of social media platforms for human trafficking purposes in the state and develop recommendations on how to stop, reduce, or prevent such use
- develop a state strategic plan for reducing human trafficking generally; and
- develop various protocols and training programs relating to human trafficking.

The Council will have a four-year window to conduct activities outlined in the bill while providing annual reports to the legislature. Once the data becomes available, it will assist the Council in the additional tasks assigned to the Council.

This bill is needed, and we ask that the Committee join us in making this a reality for a world that will benefit greatly from your actions.

Thank you to each of you and our co-authors and co-sponsors. With that, we will be happy to take your questions.

Rep. Jerry O'Connor
(608) 267-9152
Rep.O'Connor@legis.wisconsin.gov



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Van Wanggaard, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: February 21, 2024

RE: Support for SB 940, SB 942, SB 945, SB 946, SB 949, SB 954, SB 960, SB 961,
Human Trafficking

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the bishops of Wisconsin, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the following bills being heard in this committee today:

SB 940, Mandatory Training Regarding Human Trafficking
SB 942, Human Trafficking of Adults at Risk for the Purpose of Commercial Sex Acts
SB 945, Sex Offender Registration for Certain Crimes
SB 946, Testimony of a Child in a Criminal Proceeding for a Human Trafficking Crime
SB 949, Courtroom Supports and Sealing Identity of Child Victims and Witnesses
SB 954, Creation of a Human Trafficking Council
SB 960, Instruction on Human Trafficking in Certain Specialty Schools (Barbering)
SB 961, Human Trafficking Victim Services Grant Program

Human trafficking constitutes one of the gravest offenses against basic human rights and dignity. It preys upon the most vulnerable men, women, and children, who are frequently coerced into performing the most degrading forms of human labor. It denies everything that a civilized society stands for and that Catholic social teaching espouses: the protection of human dignity and human rights; the preferential option for the poor; the call to family and community; the rights of workers; and solidarity.

As of 2022, it is estimated that over 27 million people are victims of human trafficking.¹ This can take the form of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, coerced and forced labor, child soldiers, and more. That number includes more than 3.3 million children. In Wisconsin specifically, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reports nearly 800 cases involving over 1,600 victims with the vast majority suffering from sex trafficking.²

¹ International Labour Organization, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*, (September 2022)
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf

² Spectrum News 1, *How big of a problem is sex trafficking in Wisconsin?* (April 24, 2023)
<https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2023/04/19/part-1--how-big-of-a-problem-is-sex-trafficking-in-wisconsin->

The Catholic Church, along with other religious and secular institutions, is involved in combating human trafficking both nationally and internationally. In the U.S., the Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking, which consists of about twenty Catholic organizations, was one of the groups that helped draft the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations.³ Catholic women religious have been at the forefront of anti-trafficking work.⁴ They and countless other lay Catholics reach out directly to persons who are being trafficked to help with housing, transportation, childcare, employment, etc. In Milwaukee, the newly established St. Bakhita House, in partnership with Franciscan Peacemakers Clare Community, provides supportive community housing for women who are seeking to escape sex trafficking. Across Wisconsin, among people of every faith, awareness is growing that sex trafficking is destroying lives and wreaking havoc on families and communities.

The WCC, therefore, applauds those involved with the bipartisan task force for bringing forward these bills. These bills strive to give victims of human trafficking some hope that they will be delivered from their bondage and help prevent others from being ensnared in this violent and degrading world. We strongly urge the Legislature to pass these bills.

³ The Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking (CCOAHT), <https://www.usccb.org/offices/anti-trafficking-program/coalition-catholic-organizations-against-human-trafficking>

⁴ U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, <https://sistersagainstrafficking.org>



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

Testimony for the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Senate Bill 946

Relating to: sex offender registration for certain crimes

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

As Chair of the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking, I would like to share a few thoughts on this bill. This bill is a product of the hearings held during the past four months where our Human Trafficking Task Force attempted to better understand how trafficking is affecting our society, especially young people. We learned from agency representatives, DOJ, County DA offices, multiple speakers from local law enforcement, and not-for-profit victim support organizations what a challenge it is to turn the tide of human trafficking in Wisconsin.

This exercise gave us a clear pathway to several bills we could introduce that would have an effective influence and help reduce the level of sex and child sex trafficking in Wisconsin. This is one of those bills and the Task Force recommends it for passage.

The Task Force learned that the most common places for sex trafficking often involve hotel-based and residence-based prostitution. Under current law, the offense of keeping a place of prostitution is committed when an individual intentionally maintains or allows the use of a location for prostitution activities. This includes any place where specific sexual acts are consistently conducted for something of value, whether in public or private.

However, under current law, individuals convicted of keeping a place of prostitution are not required to register with the sex offender registry. This loophole enables criminals to reintegrate into our communities without detection, even after being involved in sex trafficking and posing a threat to our children. This poses a significant risk to the children of our communities, especially since 70% of sex trafficking victims begin as minors.

By adding "keeping a place of prostitution" to the list of sex offenses requiring registration as a sex offender, SB 946 enhances community safety by ensuring public notification of a sex trafficker's release.

I thank Rep. Tittl and Sen. James for authoring this bill and testifying on its behalf.

Rep. Jerry O'Connor
(608) 267-9152
Rep.O'Connor@legis.wisconsin.gov