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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Senator André Jacque
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Chairman Spiros and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as the author in support of Assembly Bill 79, the Human Trafficking Prevention Act. This legislation, modeled after current law in the states of Florida and Washington, attacks the growing scourge of human trafficking in Wisconsin by imposing a mandatory \$5,000 surcharge on individuals convicted of patronizing/soliciting prostitutes or keeping a place of prostitution.

This change has been suggested by investigators, prosecutors and victims' support and advocacy groups as a means to address present penalties for soliciting prostitution which provide an insufficient deterrent, citing a high incidence of repeat solicitation offenses by many individuals with enough disposable income to quietly pay existing fines. As noted by the California Attorney General, gangs and other criminal enterprises have learned that the sex trade and prostitution provide higher profits with a lower penal and detection risk than drug or weapons trafficking.

This proposal has passed committees in both legislative chambers on a unanimous or broad bi-partisan basis several times, including the 2019-'20 session, when it passed the full State Senate on a 32-0 vote. Gov. Evers publicly indicated his support for the identical bill in a prior session in a letter to the legislature.

This legislation has been formally supported by the Badger State Sheriffs Association, Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association, Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriff's Association, Eye Heart World, Kids Protection Agency, United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS), Wisconsin Family Action, Lutheran Office of Public Policy, HOPELINE, the City of Milwaukee, and Children's Hospital of Wisconsin.

The federal government acknowledges the link between prostitution and trafficking in women and children as a form of modern day slavery. Unfortunately, Wisconsin has become known as a major human trafficking hotspot within the Midwest, with known cases in all 72 counties and growing concern for its spread along interstate highways.

As in Florida and Washington (which have been recognized by the Polaris Project for utilizing best practices in the fight against human trafficking), Assembly Bill 79 would similarly create in Wisconsin an additional \$5,000 surcharge for violations of patronizing prostitutes, soliciting prostitutes, pandering, and keeping a place of prostitution, and equally split the proceeds of the surcharge to increase the appropriations for Internet Crimes Against Children task forces and services for Sex Trafficking Victims (Wis. Stats. 20.437 (1) (e)). Demand for prostitution drives human trafficking and a wide variety of societal costs, and increasing the civil penalty will significantly enhance deterrence while funding important victim services and enforcement efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 79. I'm happy to answer any questions.