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## Testimony for the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

### Assembly Bill 978

### Establish a Human Trafficking Council

Wednesday, January 24, 2024

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

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.

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

#### AB 978

- 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

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- 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.



STATE SENATOR

**Eric Wimberger**

DISTRICT 30

**State Senator Eric Wimberger**

**Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

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

Thank you Representative Spiros and committee members for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill 978 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 Assembly Bill 978 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 must 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 Assembly Bill 978, along with the other legislation introduced as a result of the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking, is an important first step in ending human trafficking in Wisconsin.

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To: Members, Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety  
From: Badger State Sheriffs' Association (BSSA)  
Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association (WS&DSA)  
Date: January 24, 2024  
**RE: Testimony Opposed to Assembly Bill 978**

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The Badger State Sheriffs' Association and Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association respectfully submit our testimony with concerns regarding AB 978. Our organizations have concerns with granting the Council to determine if a county is experiencing "above-average sex trafficking activities" and then establish a sex trafficking task force to combat sex trafficking in that county.

In addition, we are opposed to provisions in the bill to require any law enforcement agency, including Sheriff Offices, serving a county over 10,000 to designate an officer to coordinate the agency's human trafficking prevention and enforcement. In addition, the bill requires that officer to complete training that would be developed by the Law Enforcement Standards Board.

These requirements are essentially an unfunded mandate on local agencies for requiring a task force for certain counties and requiring many other counties with a population over 10,000 to train and designate one of our staff for this function. Sheriffs should have the discretion to decide about the needs of their county and how to best manage their deputies accordingly. We ask the bill to be amended to make these local government-level requirements an option under the bill. In addition, we do not believe additional training is necessary from the LESB.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and we look forward to working to find a solution on this important topic.

*The Badger State Sheriffs' Association represents all of Wisconsin's 72 elected county sheriffs. The Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association is a professional organization representing over 1,000 members, including sheriffs, deputies, and jail officers. Our organizations have a joint legislative committee and work closely on public safety issues of concern to our members.*





## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members, Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety  
Members, Committee on Workforce Development & Economic Opportunities  
Members, Committee on Jobs, Economy, and Small Business

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: January 24, 2024

RE: Support for AB-970, AB-971, AB972, AB-973, AB-974, AB-976, AB-978,  
AB-979, AB-980, AB-981, Human Trafficking

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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 and other Assembly committees today:

AB-970, Sex Offender Registration for Certain Crimes  
AB-971, Human Trafficking of Adults at Risk for the Purpose of Commercial Sex Acts  
AB-972, Solicitation for Prostitution and Providing a Penalty  
AB-973, Mandatory Training Regarding Human Trafficking  
AB-974, Civil Cause of Action for Human Trafficking and Trafficking a Child  
AB-976, Testimony of a Child in a Criminal Proceeding for a Human Trafficking Crime  
AB-978, Creation of a Human Trafficking Council  
AB-979, Human Trafficking Victim Services Grant Program  
AB-980, Displaying a Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline Poster  
AB-981, Instruction on Human Trafficking in Certain Specialty Schools (Barbering)

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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf)



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Wisconsin specifically, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reports nearly 800 cases involving over 1,600 victims with the vast majority suffering from sex trafficking.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> Catholic women religious have been at the forefront of anti-trafficking work.<sup>4</sup> 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 the Speaker and 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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->

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

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