

Testimony of Alex Kreidenweis
Judiciary Criminal Justice Committee
March 14, 2010

Good morning. Let me first thank the Judiciary Criminal Justice Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify. As a student of and believer in democracy it is an honor to be invited into the legislative process as a concerned citizen. I, and other citizens in attendance today, are specifically concerned with the under-recognized prevalence of human trafficking in Ohio and believe strongly that SB 235 would go far towards alleviating this egregious crime.

It is not only as a concerned citizen that I stand before you today; I am the co-founder and President of the New Abolitionist Movement. We are the student organization against human trafficking at the University of Dayton. Though our organization has not long existed it continues to expand as our student body becomes ever more aware of the unconscionable crime of human trafficking. But University of Dayton students are not unique: colleges and universities across Ohio are awakening to this subversive evil. Collectively we have come to believe that we cannot ignore human trafficking for what it is: it is slavery. It is a crime which seemingly recognizes no border, limit nor boundary. Its victims may be found in nearly every conceivable corner of the world and shamefully may be found in Ohio communities. This is a reality which Ohio cannot afford to accept.

The New Abolitionist Movement recognizes the plight of victims living in silent misery amongst us. We believe that to alleviate their misery will be a long struggle and that a necessary first step is to capture, try, and punish modern slavers. We respectfully ask that Ohio laws be improved to sufficiently empower prosecutors to litigate against this form of modern day slavery. Forty-three other states have taken such action by making human trafficking a standalone felony. Ohio should take similar action to ensure that no trafficker walks free to leave a trail of shattered victims in Ohio communities in their wake.

The New Abolitionist Movement both welcomes and supports Senate Bill 235. We regard it as a first, seminal step in the right direction. A standalone felony carrying the weight of a second degree felony will stand a strong judicial dissuasion against those who would create victims in Ohio communities. Furthermore this bill represents that Ohio recognizes that human trafficking is claiming victims in our backyards; a recent report issued by the Ohio Trafficking in Persons Commission suggests that domestic victims include over 1,000 Ohio women and children. Senate Bill 235 shows that Ohio refutes this as an injustice which cannot stand. We ask that the criminal justice committee approve and move Senate Bill 235 for its ultimate signing by the Governor; Ohio communities will be safer for its passage.

Ultimately Senate Bill 235 should not signal the end of human trafficking legislation in Ohio. A second degree felony is certainly a great leap forward, but it alone will not eradicate human trafficking. Yet there is much left to be done. We must be cognizant of the victims of this condemnable crime and ensure that their dignity and well being are secured and then restored. We must proactively strive to ensure that those most at risk of becoming victims are armed with awareness, and that those who are most likely to come into contact with victims are trained enough to recognize and respond appropriately. The New Abolitionist Movement looks forward to working closely with this Committee in the future to finally eradicate one of humanities oldest crimes.

I will conclude by once again urging the Committee to act against human trafficking through the ultimate codification of SB 235. Senate Bill 235 presents us with the opportunity to move Ohio firmly and substantially closer to finally ending this form of modern day slavery.

Thank You.

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