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Aging and Disability Services
Ohio Legislative Commission on the Education &
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Ohio Commission on Local Govt. Reform & Collaboration
Trafficking in Persons Study Commission
Task Force on Law Library Associations
Military Activation Task Force
Ohio Department of Aging Advisory Council

**Sponsor Testimony to the
House Criminal Justice Committee
May 19, 2010
House Bill 493 – Trafficking in Persons**

Thank you Chair DeGeeter, Vice Chair Pillich, Ranking Member Coley and members of the Criminal Justice Committee for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 493.

House Bill 493 will define and prohibit human trafficking in Ohio. Human trafficking is modern day slavery and includes labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Forced labor in sweatshops, hotels, households, agricultural fields and other workplaces and forced sexual exploitation, such as forced prostitution are by definition examples of Human Trafficking.

Trafficking takes away the most fundamental of human rights.

The United Nations has identified Human Trafficking as the second largest and second fastest growing criminal enterprise trailing only illegal drug trafficking. This is a multibillion dollar global industry.

The U.N. further states that each year more than one million children are forced into the global sex trade. That, of course, means that over one million children have lost their childhood and tragically many of them remain emotionally scarred throughout their lives.

Last year the Geauga County Sheriff had identified what he believed was a human trafficking operation on Mayfield Road. In Hamilton County, Ohio, an 11 year old girl was arrested and placed on probation for prostitution! This is

unreal and demonstrates the need for a change in Ohio Law. What is most shocking about this case is that a child could even be thought of as a prostitute. A child cannot be a prostitute. A child is a victim of sex abuse. It is rape in its most vicious form.

Human Traffickers prey on teen runaways. These dangerous predators entice runaways by befriending them and then they become victims. They are beaten, abused, raped, brutalized and terrorized. Tragically some perpetrators keep the teens psychologically captured by threatening to harm the families of those they capture.

The FBI has identified Toledo as one of the top recruiting center for underage prostitution in the nation and those running trafficking rings have become adept at penetrating U.S. suburban areas.

One tragic example of the problem is the case of what was referred to as a child prostitution ring in Licking County, Ohio. The perpetrators were only charged with unlawful sexual conduct with a minor and compelling prostitution.

That is because Ohio has no law specific to human trafficking. Federal trafficking laws have been in place since the year 2000. It is estimated that at least 15,000 men, women and children become victims of human servitude each year.

I believe that once we are made aware of human trafficking and its devastating impact, we must take action. This is the most humiliating, degrading and vicious form of slavery that one could imagine.

The most tragic circumstance surrounding this crime is that the victims are silent out of fear and desperation. They are emotionally and psychologically trapped and they believe they have no escape. Not only do they fear their captors, they also fear that, even though they are victims, they will be charged with a crime if they escape and go to the authorities.

I sponsored HB 636 of the 126th General Assembly and HB 15 of the 127th General Assembly, and although there were five hearings, the bill never progressed beyond the committee.

According to the Polaris Project, a national anti-trafficking organization, Ohio is one of just 6 states without a human trafficking law on the books.

Among other provisions, House Bill 493:

- **Defines Human Trafficking and makes the new offense of trafficking in persons a second degree felony.**
- **Designates the penalty for forcing anyone under age 16 into prostitution a first degree felony.**
- **Modifies existing Ohio law on kidnapping, abduction, compelling prostitution, organized criminal activity and conspiracy to make them more useful in human trafficking prosecutions.**
- **Requires training for peace officers for investigation, methods to identify victims and methods for prosecution in collaboration with other agencies.**
- **Sets up public awareness programs targeting at risk populations. Posters with a new human trafficking toll-free hotline will be put in places such as truck stops.**

House Bill 493 is a comprehensive approach to addressing human trafficking in Ohio. The provisions of the bill closely mirror the legislation recommendations from Ohio Trafficking in Persons Study Commission, a commission established by HB 280 of the 127th General Assembly. This commission, of which I am a member, brought together law enforcement, social service agencies and state and federal government entities to address this issue.

Human Trafficking is a little recognized but extremely serious crime that deserves your consideration.

I ask that you schedule another hearing at which time I can bring victims, advocates, law enforcement officials and others to provide testimony on this important issue.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.