



ANDRÉ JACQUE

STATE SENATOR • 1ST SENATE DISTRICT

Phone: (608) 266-3512

Fax: (608) 282-3541

Sen.Jacque@legis.wi.gov

State Capitol · P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Senator André Jacque

February 21, 2024

Chairman Wanggaard and Colleagues:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 961, which creates a human trafficking victim services grant program.

Human trafficking is a significant concern in Wisconsin, with reports in all 72 counties and corridors crisscrossing our state. Wisconsin has been considered the “Sex Trafficking Capital of the Midwest” by law enforcement for several years.

Senate Bill 961 will help fill a vital role in building capacity to serve victims of sex trafficking by establishing a pilot program that will provide fifty percent matching funds up to \$2.5 million over two years to assist victim support organizations in providing the critical care services - such as food, job training, and housing - needed to help individuals escape this bondage and lead free, independent lives.

This bill is an important part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent human trafficking, and works well in concert with human trafficking legislation I introduced with Rep. Bodden earlier this session that has already passed this and another Assembly committee with bipartisan support.

I am pleased the Legislature, on a bipartisan basis, is recognizing the need for the State of Wisconsin to combat human trafficking. This effort is about putting an end to sexual exploitation in our state and restoring human dignity to victims.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 961. I am happy to take any questions.



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

February 21, 2024

Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Testimony for Senate Bill 961 Relating to Human Trafficking Victim Services Grant Program

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

Matched Grant Funding for Victim Support Organizations:

In the course of these hearings, we heard from 13 not-for-profit victim support organizations that are providing a variety of critical services to victims of sex trafficking. When victims who are controlled by a sex trafficker arrive at a support center, we learn that 70% were drawn into what they refer to as "the life" when they were minors. In other words, they came from Jr. and Sr. high schools.

In too many cases, they did not finish high school, they don't have traditional work experience, are totally dependent on their trafficker/controller for all of their basic needs from ranging from food, clothing, a phone, transportation, and lodging. Finally, the tools a trafficker will include drugs, alcohol or other vices to keep the individuals dependent on the trafficker. Many women are estranged from family and really have few options to grab hold of in order to try to turn their lives around.

The not-for-profits we heard from saw a need and stepped into this difficult challenge. Their clients need almost everything. It takes time, money and caring people to build trust, skills and a pathway to recovery. These groups, without big government programs, went out and raised the resources to include professional counselors and education materials. They built donor based inventories of basic need items a victim would need to break the cycle of dependency on a trafficker. You pull all that together, add some private funding and a ton of volunteer hours and we see where they are meeting the needs of hundreds of victims today in Wisconsin.

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

The groups are well acquainted with law enforcement and state agencies. We saw that as the various groups embraced one another in our hearings. Law enforcement often brings women to these organizations rather than to jail. Our law enforcement and agencies need these organizations to fill the needs they offer to victims.

The men and women involved in these organizations are carrying out a truly humanitarian effort. However, they are stretched in every way. From our interaction with these groups, they need additional critical resources to meet the needs they face every day.

This bill is essentially a program that will provide \$2.5 million dollars in (50%) matched grant funding to help assist these organizations in providing the services they offer to a clientele that is invisible to most of the public. The bill includes guidelines to insure that the monies are used as intended.

This bill and its funding dollars are 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 (CCOAH), <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>