

October 17, 2016

Members of the Senate
Pennsylvania General Assembly
Harrisburg, PA

RE: PCAR Supports Safe Harbor for minor victims of sex trafficking, SB 851

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) advocates for the rights and needs of victims of sexual assault and works to eliminate all forms of sexual violence. PCAR works with a network of 50 sexual assault centers that serve all 67 of the Commonwealth's counties. PCAR urges members of the Senate to pass the Safe Harbor bill (S.B. 851), sponsored by Senator Greenleaf.

Currently in Pennsylvania, minor victims of human trafficking can still be penalized and prosecuted—as if they are criminals rather than victims. Children who are trafficked often flee sexual abuse at home, only to be preyed upon by traffickers on the streets. Their lives are controlled by traffickers who often use violence, intimidation, threats, and coercion. These children are in survival mode—often forced to commit crimes or barter sex for shelter, food, health care, and other basic needs. They are told by their traffickers that no one will believe them and that they will get in trouble if they try to get help. Prosecuting these children reinforces traffickers' harmful messages and further isolates victims, cutting them off from the very systems that should protect them.

“Safe Harbor” legislation, already enacted in over thirty states across the United States, establishes protections for sexually exploited children from further traumatization. The bill calls for a victim-centered criminal justice reform for sexually exploited and trafficked children. The legislation would do the following:

- 1.) Protect child victims from prosecution for the crime of prostitution and prostitution-related offenses including: criminal trespass, disorderly conduct, loitering and prowling at night, obstructing highways or public passageways, false identification to law enforcement, simple possession of a controlled substance.
- 2.) Require police and law enforcement to attend intensive trainings focused on identifying a sexually exploited child, interviewing and engaging a sexually exploited child, and assisting in locating additional services for the victims.
- 3.) Establish a fund for victim services and public awareness about human trafficking funded from the convicted traffickers' fines.
- 4.) Assist child protective services agencies in developing specialized victim services for trafficked children including: housing, education, employment, therapy, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, medical and dental care, case management, clothing, tattoo or “branding” removal, or any other needs the victims may require.

We ask the Commonwealth leadership to show their support for Safe Harbor, S.B. 851. If you would like further information or would like to discuss this, please contact Donna Greco, Policy Director (dgreco@pcar.org or 717-728-9740 ext. 114).

Sincerely,

Donna Greco
Policy Director