

May 14, 2015

Senator Sarah Gelser, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood

Chair Gelser and members of the Committee:

Good Afternoon, I am Senator Jackie Winters, representing Senate District 10 in Marion and Polk counties. I bring testimony today on HB 3143-A.

HB 3143-A addresses a significant and vicious issue that has statewide impact: human trafficking. Human trafficking is, in my opinion, a modern-day form of slavery. The primary victims are female – our data indicate they represent 80% of all victims - and fully half of those victims are children and youth under the age of 18 years. I believe we need to work diligently to stop this insidious practice. Human bondage in any form is just not acceptable. For some time, the incidence of human trafficking has been greater in Oregon than in most other states, due in part to the presence of the I-5 corridor and Portland’s status as an international hub.

Anything that we, as legislators, can do to diminish this barbaric, demeaning and dangerous situation is paramount, and urgent action is needed. Part of the problem is the secrecy implicit in the “bond” that traffickers impose on their victims, by telling them they are “not wanted,” “not loved or cared about”, and that the trafficker is the **ONLY** one who can protect and care for them, and other outright lies. The good news is that there is a national Hotline that allows victims to access help without the knowledge of their pimp, which is one of the very few strategies that work, but only if victims are aware of it and use it.

We know of the 56 Oregon cases identified in 2014, 45 were related to sex trafficking, but only six of those victims accessed help through the Hotline. HB 3143-A seeks to increase access to the Hotline number by partnering with a key existing nonprofit organization to place more compelling information inside bathroom stalls in establishments known to be frequented by traffickers and victims - one of the only safe places for victims to make contact for help.

HB 3143-A also sets the parameters under which the nonprofit and Oregon Liquor Control Commission, which licenses most of the affected venues. The nature of the crimes related to human trafficking make it imperative that we approve this very low-cost strategy. I urge your support in the approval of this bill.

Sincerely,

Jackie Winters
State Senator
District 10