

February 16, 2022

Re: SB497

Good morning!

I am Dr. Sharon Sullivan. I am here to testify on behalf of HTAB, the Human Trafficking Advisory Board (HTAB), Awareness, Prevention and Education committee. I am also an educator and advocate.

I've spent nearly 20 years addressing human trafficking in Kansas in a variety of ways. Let me be clear: Human Trafficking happens here! It is happening in our rural communities and our big cities, in our schools and homes, in our neighborhoods and businesses. The victims are Kansans-our neighbors, our coworkers, our children. It is a horrific life most of us can't even imagine.

For a lot of complex reasons, very few victims self-identify or ask for help. All are under the control of a trafficker who uses force, fraud and coercion to control the exploited person. They do not have the freedom to leave the situation.

Too many times, we see this crime ignored, or worse, mischaracterized, due to a lack of accurate information. Education and training of professionals who regularly encounter vulnerable people is crucial to prevent victimization and accurately identify people who have already been victimized by this crime.

This is a very complex crime. No one will become an expert in a one-hour training. However, participants can learn to identify signs of human trafficking and how to respond appropriately. This can be life changing for the person trapped in human trafficking. Additionally, these trainings build on the existing knowledge of each profession, adding to their skill set within their discipline.

Many agencies and organizations, including the A.G.'s office, have worked diligently to provide trainings to professionals in Kansas, but we need comprehensive, ongoing, and quality training. This can best be achieved through legislation. Victims are often identified only because a trained professional noticed a red flag and knew who to call. The safety of the most vulnerable Kansans depends on more professionals recognizing their victimization and taking action. Please empower them to do so. Please pass SB497.

Thank you,

Sharon L. Sullivan, Ph.D.