

LWV Ohio Statehouse Day – March 31, 2015

Human Trafficking: Implementing New Legislation

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Ohio has significantly improved its capacity to address the problems of human trafficking (modern-day slavery) through new legislation and aggressive law enforcement. The focus of the most recent legislation is to end the market demand for commercial sex. House Bill 130, the End Demand Act, is intended to deter the “johns” from purchasing sex through harsher penalties for soliciting minors and other strategies. HB 130 passed last session; I testified in support of the bill in both the House and the Senate. Its passage brought Ohio a “most improved” rating among states in the fight against trafficking.

LWV Ohio’s program position allowed us to support the demand reduction strategies in the bill, including:

- Adding “electronic means” as an illegal method of advertising to promote prostitution;
- Increasing the statute of limitations for trafficking to 20 years;
- Increasing the penalty from a misdemeanor to a felony for purchasing sex from a minor;
- Requiring that a purchaser of sex from a minor register as a tier two sex offender; and
- Notifying a spouse if a person is arrested and charged with a trafficking offense (this provision was eliminated from the bill).

A key provision of the bill is that 16- and 17-year-olds are to be treated as victims when trafficked. Previously, Ohio law did not agree with federal law, which does consider all minors as victims and entitled to the same legal protections. The provisions in this bill rectify that situation, which had resulted from a compromise when prior legislation was passed.

Another key provision of HB 130 is the termination of parental rights if parents are found guilty of trafficking their own child. League positions advocating for the prevention of child abuse and neglect and the prevention of violence have allowed us to support this provision as well.

Human trafficking, both labor and sex trafficking, continues to be a multi-million dollar enterprise. The passage of HB 130 strengthens Ohio’s ability to fight this scourge.

The Message: Next steps, now that the law is in effect, are the training of local law enforcement and education of the public. These efforts continue through the Attorney General’s office and through local coalitions. For local organizations and coalitions in which Leagues can be involved in fighting trafficking, see the Polaris Project web site, www.polarisproject.org/state-map/ohio.

More information is available at www.humantrafficking.ohio.gov/Resources.

Be aware that new legislation requested by law enforcement is pending that would require DNA testing of persons committing misdemeanor crimes such as voyeurism or soliciting so that this information is available in resolving rape cases and other more serious crimes.