

LWV Ohio Statehouse Day – April 9, 2014

LWVO Lobbyist Report

Human Trafficking: End the Demand

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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, but there's more to do. The focus of pending legislation is to end the market demand for commercial sex.

Rep. Teresa Fedor, the legislator who has made eradicating human trafficking in Ohio her cause, is sponsoring House Bill 130, the End Demand Act. It is intended to deter the "johns" from purchasing sex through harsher penalties for soliciting minors and other strategies. HB 130 passed the House last June; it is currently being heard in the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. I testified in support of the bill on February 25.

LWV Ohio's program position allows 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.

A key provision of the bill is that 16- and 17-year-olds are to be treated as victims when trafficked. Currently, Ohio law does not agree with federal law, which does consider all minors as victims and entitled to the same legal protections. The proposed provision in this bill would 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 will strengthen Ohio's ability to fight this scourge.

The Message: Tell your senator that you want to see HB 130 passed before the summer recess, with the inclusion of 16- and 17-year-olds as victims. For local organizations in which Leagues can be involved in fighting trafficking, see the Polaris Project web site, www.polarisproject.org/state-map/ohio.