



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Van Wanggaard, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: February 4, 2026

RE: Support for SB 838 and SB 849, Support for Survivors of Human Trafficking

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the bishops of Wisconsin, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 838, Human Trafficking Victim Services Grant, and SB 849, Civil Cause of Action for Child Trafficking. Last session, the WCC supported a package of 10 anti-human trafficking bills, which included versions of these two bills.

Human trafficking constitutes one of the gravest offenses against basic human rights and dignity. It preys upon the most vulnerable men, women, and children, who are frequently coerced into performing the most degrading forms of human labor. It denies everything that a civilized society stands for and that Catholic social teaching espouses: the protection of human dignity and human rights, the preferential option for the poor, the call to family and community, the rights of workers, and solidarity.

As of 2022, it is estimated that over 27 million people are victims of human trafficking.¹ This can take the form of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, coerced and forced labor, child soldiers, and more. That number includes more than 3.3 million children. Since its inception in 2007, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reports over 1,100 cases involving over 2,200 victims in Wisconsin alone.²

The Catholic Church, along with other religious and secular institutions, is involved in combating human trafficking both nationally and internationally. In the U.S., the Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking, which consists of about twenty Catholic organizations, was one of the groups that helped draft the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations.³ Most recently, Catholic Charities USA strongly supported⁴

¹ International Labour Organization, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*, (September 2022) https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf

² National Human Trafficking Hotline, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/statistics/wisconsin>

³ The Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking, <https://www.usccb.org/offices/anti-trafficking-program/coalition-catholic-organizations-against-human-trafficking>

⁴ Catholic Charities USA, <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/2026/01/16/ccusa-expresses-gratitude-for-bipartisan-passage-of-trafficking-survivors-relief-act/>

the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act, passed with bipartisan support and just signed into law by President Trump.⁵ Catholic women religious have been at the forefront of anti-trafficking work.⁶ They and countless other lay Catholics reach out directly to persons who are being trafficked to help with housing, transportation, childcare, employment, etc. For example, in Milwaukee, the St. Bakhita House provides supportive community housing for women who are seeking to escape sex trafficking. Across Wisconsin, among people of every faith, awareness is growing that sex trafficking is destroying lives and wreaking havoc on families and communities.

The WCC applauds the authors for bringing these bipartisan bills forward. These bills will support survivors of human trafficking in their healing and pursuit of justice. We strongly ask for your support.

⁵ Trafficking Survivors Relief Act (2026), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/4323>

⁶ Alliance to End Human Trafficking, <https://alliancetoendhumantrafficking.org/>