



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: State Representative Shae Sortwell, Chair
Members, Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director for Education and Religious Liberty

DATE: April 12, 2023

RE: AB 60, Adult-Entertainment Establishments

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to support Assembly Bill 60, which seeks to protect victims of sex trafficking in adult-entertainment establishments.

Sex trafficking constitutes one of the gravest and most violent human rights abuses. Vulnerable men, women, and children are coerced into performing the most degrading acts—acts that can destroy their sense of self-worth and cause irreparable physical, mental, and emotional harm. A 2014 study on the health consequences of sex trafficking found that survivors reported that because of their brutal treatment, 41 percent had attempted suicide and 54 percent suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.¹ Even after survivors were able to escape trafficking, 96 percent experienced psychological distress, 80 percent experienced depression, and 71 percent experienced shame or guilt. More than two-thirds of survivors contracted one or more sexually-transmitted disease or infection. Most women became pregnant while trafficked and more than half obtained abortions, sometimes against their will. Eighty-four percent used alcohol and drugs while trafficked, either because they were forced by their traffickers or as a means to numb their minds and bodies to the pain they were experiencing.

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.² Catholic women religious have been at the forefront of anti-trafficking work.³ They and countless other lay

¹ *The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare* (2014)

² The Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking (CCOAHT) <https://www.usccb.org/offices/anti-trafficking-program/coalition-catholic-organizations-against-human-trafficking>

³ U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking: <https://sistersagainstrafficking.org>

Catholics reach out directly to persons who are being trafficked to help with housing, transportation, childcare, employment, etc. In Milwaukee, the newly established St. Bakhita House, in partnership with Franciscan Peacemakers Clare Community, 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.

Since testifying on the Senate version of the bill, several concerns have been brought to our attention.

In subsection 3(a) regarding employment records, the bill allows a law enforcement officer to present his or her credentials and request a list of employees from the establishment. The establishment is required to comply with that request by the following business day.

This window of time—though perhaps necessary for fulfilling the request—allows traffickers a full day to whisk away a victim and potentially scrub their records before handing them over. Alternatively, a search warrant—backed by probable cause and signed off by a judge—could be executed immediately and perhaps yield better results.

Additionally, subsection 3(a) may encourage law enforcement to abuse their authority in these establishments. Law enforcement officers might be able to use this provision to obtain information for illicit and non-investigative purposes.

For these reasons, the WCC recommends removing or amending subsection 3(a) and instead requiring a search warrant.

The WCC, applauds the sponsors of Assembly Bill 60 for striving to give victims of human trafficking some hope that they will be delivered from their bondage. Should it pass, it will ensure that many others will never become ensnared in this violent and degrading world. We strongly urge the Committee to pass the bill with our recommended amendment.