



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members, Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Members, Committee on Workforce Development & Economic Opportunities
Members, Committee on Jobs, Economy, and Small Business

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: January 24, 2024

RE: Support for AB-970, AB-971, AB972, AB-973, AB-974, AB-976, AB-978,
AB-979, AB-980, AB-981, Human Trafficking

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the bishops of Wisconsin, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the following bills being heard in this and other Assembly committees today:

AB-970, Sex Offender Registration for Certain Crimes
AB-971, Human Trafficking of Adults at Risk for the Purpose of Commercial Sex Acts
AB-972, Solicitation for Prostitution and Providing a Penalty
AB-973, Mandatory Training Regarding Human Trafficking
AB-974, Civil Cause of Action for Human Trafficking and Trafficking a Child
AB-976, Testimony of a Child in a Criminal Proceeding for a Human Trafficking Crime
AB-978, Creation of a Human Trafficking Council
AB-979, Human Trafficking Victim Services Grant Program
AB-980, Displaying a Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline Poster
AB-981, Instruction on Human Trafficking in Certain Specialty Schools (Barbering)

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. In

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



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Wisconsin specifically, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reports nearly 800 cases involving over 1,600 victims with the vast majority suffering from sex trafficking.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 Catholic women religious have been at the forefront of anti-trafficking work.⁴ They and countless other lay 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.

The WCC, therefore, applauds the Speaker and those involved with the bipartisan task force for bringing forward these bills. These bills strive to give victims of human trafficking some hope that they will be delivered from their bondage and help prevent others from being ensnared in this violent and degrading world. We strongly urge the Legislature to pass these bills.

² Spectrum News 1, *How big of a problem is sex trafficking in Wisconsin?* (April 24, 2023) <https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2023/04/19/part-1--how-big-of-a-problem-is-sex-trafficking-in-wisconsin->

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

⁴ U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking: <https://sistersagainstrafficking.org>