

February 28, 2024

**The undersigned non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and anti-trafficking leaders who work to end human trafficking, write in support of H.R. 7137, the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act of 2024 (TSRA) introduced by Representatives Fry (R-SC) Rep. Lieu (D-CA) and Rep. Ann Wagner (R-MO) in the House of Representatives.** A companion bill is pending introduction in the Senate.

The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act of 2024 provides relief to trafficking survivors who have been unjustly criminalized as a result of their trafficking victimization. Too often, trafficking victims are arrested and convicted of criminal offenses directly related to their victimization.[1] Though many states have a statute for human trafficking survivors to access relief from criminal records which resulted from trafficking, there is currently no legal framework at the federal level for trafficking survivors to either avoid unjust criminalization at the outset and/or address the harmful effects of having been charged and convicted of crimes resulting from their victimization. The TSRA helps to address both of those gaps.

The legislation would allow survivors of human trafficking with federal records for certain crimes committed as a direct result of their trafficking situation to vacate convictions and expunge arrest records.[2] It would also allow for an affirmative defense for victims of human trafficking to assert at the outset of the criminal justice process. Finally, the bill would expressly permit Department of Justice (DOJ) grants to allow for legal representation for survivors including proceedings related to vacatur, expungement and other post-conviction relief measures.

Many survivors have a criminal record as a result of being trafficked. This criminal record impedes survivors from moving forward with their lives, including impacting opportunities for employment, housing and rental applications, loans for higher education, and purchasing their own home. This legislation recognizes the injustice of leaving trafficking survivors to carry convictions for crimes that resulted from their victimization, and instead creates a pathway for survivors to continue their journey of healing and restoration.

As sex trafficking survivor and advocate Julie Whitehead stated, “My trafficker forced me into situations where I easily could have been arrested, but I complied because I knew it was a matter of life and death. I knew if I didn’t do exactly what my trafficker told me, he would make good on his threats and kill me or someone I loved. This bill would be life-changing for victims and survivors of trafficking. Almost every decision we make is to help us survive, and we should not be punished or held accountable for having made the decision to live.”

This is one of many testimonies from survivors and advocates demonstrating why survivors need a pathway to clear federal convictions from their criminal records, as well as the opportunity to assert their victimization as a defense to prevent convictions from occurring in the first place. Thankfully, Congress has the unique ability to begin to remedy this situation. **As such, the undersigned groups urge you to co-sponsor the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act and to support its passage when it comes to the floor or a committee on which you serve.**

[1] [Criminalizing Victims: Trafficking Survivors With Criminal Records Deserve Relief | Polaris \(polarisproject.org\)](#)

[2] <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/7137>

## **ORGANIZATIONS**

3Strands Global Foundation

ACLI

Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST)

Allies Against Slavery

Amirah, Inc.

AncoraTN (formerly End Slavery Tennessee)

ANEW Life International, Inc

Ascend Consulting

Association of Prosecuting Attorneys

Bekah Speaks Out

Bennett Equipment And Supply Co., Inc.

Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition

Bloom

BuildOn

CASA Nashville

Central Minnesota Sexual Assault Center

Central Missouri Stop Human Trafficking Coalition

Chains Interrupted

Cheyenne River Education Agency

Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE)

Christa Yandell Counseling

Empower Her Network

Engage Together

Felony Murder Elimination Project

Teresa Forliti - Survivor Leader

Fortra

Free the Slaves

Free to Thrive

Freedom Business Alliance

GenerateHope

goodMRKT

Tanya Gould - International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC)  
for the OSCE

Grace's Place Ministries

Grow Free Tennessee

HeartDance Foundation

Hello In There Foundation

Hope for Justice

Bella Hounakey - US Advisory Council on Human Trafficking  
Interparliamentary Taskforce on Human Trafficking  
Jasmine Road  
Jasmine Kitchen  
Kim Nunn Creative  
Laffey Bucci Kent, LLP  
Lighthouse For Life  
Love Never Fails  
Lynn's Warriors  
Maewest Enterprises  
MBEC  
Mentari  
Moms for America  
Moore & Van Allen Human Trafficking Pro Bono Project  
Mountain Town Counseling  
My House  
My Name My Voice  
Hollie Nadel - Survivor Leader  
National Center on Sexual Exploitation  
National Council of Catholic Women  
Never Alone Transitional  
Nurses United Against Human Trafficking, P.A.  
Open Door at Family Assistance Program  
OrangeStar Ventures  
PACT by ECPAT-USA  
Paving the Way Foundation  
Polaris  
Porn Free Colorado  
Prevention Works Joint Task Force & Coalition  
Project STAND  
Raven  
Reality of a Desi Girl®  
Refuge for Women Texas Gulf Coast  
Rescue Us Inc.  
Restore Corps  
Restore NYC  
Sarasota Police Department  
Secure Survivors  
Shared Hope International  
South Carolina Counseling Association  
Street Grace

Survivor Leader Network of San Diego  
Survivor-Led Solutions  
SWFL Coalition Against Human Trafficking  
The Foundation United  
The NOMORE Foundation  
The Race 4 Kids  
The Secret Place Home  
There Is Hope For Me, Inc.  
Thistle & Butterfly  
Thistle Farms  
Trades of hope  
Trafficking in America Task Force  
Travelers Rest City Council  
Uncaged  
United Human Rights Foundation  
United Ministries  
Utah PTA  
Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking  
West Virginia Faith & Freedom Coalition  
Julie Whitehead - Survivor Leader  
Alan Wilkett - Sergeant Pasco County Sheriff (Ret.)  
World Without Exploitation  
Brittany Wyland - TN Department of Children's Services  
Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force  
Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.