

Senator Ryan Aument  
Senate of Pennsylvania  
36th Senate District  
Senate Box 203036  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3036

March 28th, 2022

Dear Senator Aument,

To the modern person, slavery is a practice of the past. However, while the abolishment of slavery may have criminalized and outlawed the institution, it is still infesting our globe. Human trafficking, affecting roughly 24.9 million victims worldwide at any given time, deprives individuals of the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness we hold so dear as sacred human rights.

Just this past January, Lancaster, my home county, created a task force dedicated to preventing human trafficking by prosecuting perpetrators and supporting victims who escape the despicable institution. Two weeks ago, the Lancaster County Human Trafficking Task Force successfully conducted their first mission, capturing fourteen suspects involved in a fake prostitution sting at a hotel in East Hempfield Township. As ecstatic as I was to hear of its rapid success, I was disturbed to learn of the home addresses of those who were charged. Three of the men, caught and arrested at the hotel during the operation, are from my own tiny community of Maytown and the two adjacent towns next to me. I always knew that Johns, or clients of the trafficking business, could be anywhere, but to know that one lived within a mile radius of my home shattered my sense of security, causing me to feel a lack of safety for my sisters, friends, and self. Had I rubbed shoulders with him at a community event? Was he a neighbor of my best friend? This violation of human rights, secretly encouraged and committed worldwide, became much more personal when I realized that, even in Lancaster—a destination famous for its quaint farms, simple Amish population, and delightful cow manure—human traffickers still lurk for people like me.

Although this information may have created reason for concern, the task force's undercover operation brought needed attention to the human trafficking issue and the necessary work our Pennsylvania Legislature could do to prevent it. In Senate Resolution no. 216, a piece of bipartisan legislation from the beginning of this past year, you and twenty other PA Senators sought to recognize the month of January 2022 as "National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month" in PA. In the text of the Resolution, you stated that, in 2020 alone, "221 unique situations of trafficking" were identified in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through the National Human Trafficking Hotline. However, while 221 scenarios is a notable statistic, the trafficking industry is still alive and well in Pennsylvania, and reports like those from Lancaster's trafficking prevention task force demonstrate that fact clearly. While I am strongly encouraged by the commendable awareness you and the PA Senate are seeking to bring to the issue, I believe the state can take further action to help stop this illicit trade. As you stated in Resolution no. 216, "efforts should be made to *actively* oppose" human trafficking here in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

To *actively* oppose the contemptible institution, my proposed legislation would assist in the prevention of human trafficking throughout the state. Along with Lancaster, counties such as York and Montgomery county have decided to implement human trafficking task forces, but this system is relatively new and hasn't been tried by many of the smaller counties around the state. To motivate Pennsylvania counties, I propose legislation that creates a Human Trafficking Prevention (HTP) county task force template. This template would include a model to follow when forming their individual task force. This model could follow the preexisting organizational structures of forces like Lancaster, York, and Montgomery County, causing less work for counties considering the creation of a HTP task force. An existing model would incorporate methods of operations and strategies that are proving successful in existing forces. A state-built model would encourage the development of task forces state-wide as well as allow for a formal analysis of current HTP methods, information sharing, and their success in task force operations.

In addition to a standard model for HTP task forces, I propose that the PA legislature pass legislation that specifically devotes funds to county District Attorney offices—who are responsible for running the HTP forces—that are designated to county task forces, assuring their success. Without state resources, county tax payers are currently funding HTP task forces and their operations. Budgeted monies are distributed to the D.A.'s office by the county, but the limited funds restrict resources and time that could be allotted to each HTP task force. If the state provides financial support to each county, counties currently without a task force would be able to create one, and those already with one would only enhance their services. Such fundable services include, but are not limited to, the salaries of specific officers, detectives, and investigators who are the manpower of task force functions, technological programs that increase the prosperity of online operations, and recovery support for victims rescued through the programs. With the commonwealth's help, counties would have the necessities and means for beginning an HTP task force and the support needed for ensuring each one's success.

Again, as our PA Senate has exclaimed, “this Commonwealth has a tradition of advancing fundamental human rights.” In order to further the protection of PA citizens and continue the fight against this modern form of slavery, an HTP task force state-made model and funds would enable county task forces to thrive. To actively oppress the human trafficking oppressors of our Commonwealth, the PA Legislature should support the development and continuance of HTP task forces. Thank you for contemplating such an uncomfortable but immensely relevant issue that has become rampant in Pennsylvania and the rest of our world. As we band together against the antithesis of freedom, I urge you and our PA Senate to consider my proposed legislation as an avenue to the prevention of human trafficking in Pennsylvania.

I appreciate you taking the time to ponder this possible legislation as well as other actions we can take as a state to defeat such an abominable institution.

Respectfully,

Hannah Slobozien  
Donegal High School