



March 13, 2023

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of SF2269. My name is Madeline Lohman, and I am an Associate Program Director at The Advocates for Human Rights. I have been working to address labor trafficking in Minnesota for nearly a decade, conducting research, developing protocols, and training government agencies and community organizations across the state. This bill address possibly the biggest gap in our efforts to combat labor trafficking as a state and is crucially important to ensuring safety for victims and accountability for traffickers.

Currently, there are no dedicated state-funded services for labor trafficking victims. This is a complex crime that inflicts significant trauma on its victims, who are generally trapped in the trafficking situation not only because of the threats and abuses of the trafficker, but also because they have no alternative source of housing, income, food, clothing, transportation, or other basic needs. No matter how inadequate the support provided by the trafficker, it seems better than nothing. Without access to victim advocacy, case management, housing, counseling, and other supportive services, victims face extremely high barriers to exiting trafficking situations.

The Advocates provides immigration legal services to trafficking victims and we see the lack of services impact our clients again and again. We recently had a case where over 50 farmworkers were living on a farm in a trafficking situation. After an investigation, they left the trafficker, but had no housing or ability to work, so some of them abandoned their case against the trafficker to return to their home country where they could support themselves and their families. We also worked with a child labor trafficking victim who had left their trafficker and was waiting for federal immigration status, but ended up being trafficked again into a dangerous job in the construction industry because he could not access any supports while his status was pending. In another case, a trafficking victim was entitled to benefits, but had no caseworker or advocate to connect him to help and so ended up homeless. A young woman who was trafficked by her boyfriend could not access mental health supports. After she was assaulted, she experienced a mental break and went missing for a year, requiring her to re-file for immigration status, delaying her ability to rebuild her life and causing significant mental anguish.

We have all seen the recent news reports about children illegally working dangerous jobs in meat packing plants. However, none of those children in Minnesota have sought assistance because they fear what might happen to themselves or their families. If there was a dedicated victim advocate, that person could continue to build trust with those children and the children could have confidence that if they came forward, they would receive the support they need.

We are not the only ones to see the negative impact of the lack of dedicated services for labor trafficking victims. I have spent the past two years working with the MN Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and a working group of labor trafficking survivors, service providers, and other experts to develop a protocol so that law enforcement can effectively identify and investigate labor trafficking cases. By far, the

biggest concern we heard as we developed the protocol was not how to build these cases or how to work with the complex overlapping criminal and civil justice issues, but how to ensure that victims would be safe after an encounter with law enforcement. This was the issue that law enforcement officers raised again and again – who could they call when they encountered a victim that would understand the situation, be able to help the victim feel comfortable with law enforcement involvement, and provide the victim a safe, stable place to stay while the case progressed. Without those resources, law enforcement officers pointed out that not only would it be difficult to prosecute the trafficker, because the victim would be less able to assist in the investigation, but their involvement could make matters worse. We had no good answer to their concern.

I have also trained service providers, community organizations, medical providers, and other organizations around the state to identify labor trafficking. Again, the question I hear after every training is, “Who do I call?” There is never a satisfactory answer. In each community, people must contact organizations that do not focus on labor trafficking and investigate whether they have the capacity, resources, and knowledge to help a labor trafficking victim. For a victim themselves, this is an insurmountable obstacle since they frequently have almost no time or opportunity to reach out for help. Organizations step up even without those resources and find themselves overwhelmed by the needs of labor trafficking victims. We provide dedicated services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking. Labor trafficking inflicts similar trauma and harm on victims, and we leave them with nothing.

On behalf of everyone we work with to combat labor trafficking – survivors, law enforcement, service providers, community partners – we ask you to support this bill and ensure that labor trafficking victims in Minnesota receive the care, support, and safety they so richly deserve. Thank you.



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