



March 22, 2023

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Health & Human Services Committee,

Thank you for providing time on your agenda to hear SF 1839 and for your ongoing support of the Safe Harbor network and youth survivors of sex trafficking. The Advocates for Human Rights supports this bill, which will provide necessary resources to youth in our state who are at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The Advocates for Human Rights has been part of the movement to improve our state's response to human trafficking since the law was first passed in 2005 and led efforts to enact the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Act in 2011. We have conducted numerous fact-finding reports and work with survivors, victim advocates, service providers, and law enforcement agencies to improve policies, develop protocols, and provide training. We are proud of Minnesota's investment in the Safe Harbor system, which supports an innovative, evidence-based approach to preventing and responding to human trafficking.

One of the most important factors in determining whether a youth can successfully leave a trafficking situation is access to support and services, and the Safe Harbor network provides that support. According to the Wilder Research Center Evaluation conducted between 2017 and 2019, there were a total of 1,279 youth served by Safe Harbor funded grantees. The results reported by youth who received Safe Harbor services are extraordinary: **97%** of these youth self-reported **positive changes in their life**, **100%** felt more **prepared to reach their educational goals**, and **89%** felt more **prepared to support themselves** in a financially safe way.

Some of the biggest needs for trafficking survivors are housing and mental health supports. In addition, an effective response requires intense coordination between the criminal justice system, child protection, and service providers, which the Safe Harbor network provides through its Regional Navigators. This bill makes important investments in these areas: \$9 million for additional street outreach workers, emergency shelter beds and housing; an additional \$9 million for supportive services such as mental health therapy/CD counseling/educational and vocational programs; and an additional \$2 million to expand the Regional Navigator Program.

Human trafficking is a serious human rights violation that deserves a robust response, especially for child victims. We ask that you dedicate this needed funding to ensure that victims have the safety and support they need.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Madeline Lohman".

Madeline Lohman
Associate Program Director, Training and Technical Assistance
The Advocates for Human Rights