



Missouri House of Representatives

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Missouri House Passes Bill Furthering the Protection of Vulnerable Persons from Human Trafficking

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – In a continued effort to address human trafficking and safeguard the vulnerable individuals, the Missouri House of Representatives has passed HB 2688. The bill, sponsored by State Representative Jeff Myers, marks a crucial step forward in the work being done to combat these pressing issues.

The piece of legislation creates a statute of limitation related to sex and human trafficking offenses in the Show-Me State and establishes essential mechanisms to tackle those issues, including the creation of the "Council on Human Trafficking" within the Department of Public Safety. This committee, composed of diverse stakeholders, will regularly meet to coordinate prevention training, provide victims with services needed, evaluate state statistics, and promoting awareness to the public.

Representative Myers told colleagues that the state has got to think of human trafficking in broader terms than how it is defined. He said it goes beyond, "using fraud, force, or coercion to exploit a person for labor, services, or commercial sex."

"This legislation underscores our commitment to protecting our most vulnerable citizens from the scourge of trafficking and exploitation," Myers, R-Warrenton, said. "By establishing robust training programs, creating oversight mechanisms, and enhancing penalties for offenders, we are sending a clear message that Missouri will not tolerate these heinous crimes."

HB 2688 would require the prosecution of certain human trafficking offenses to begin within 20 years, and creates an additional offense of patronizing a victim of sexual servitude. The additional offense would be a felony that could possibly carry five to 20 years in prison, with an additional fine of up to \$250,000 if the victim is 18 years or older. If a victim is under the age of 18, the prison term is an allowable life without parole or until an offender has served at least 25 years of the sentence. Any person convicted of this newly adopted offense would also be required to pay restitution fees to their victim.

Furthermore, the aforementioned offense of patronizing a victim of sexual servitude alongside the offense of enabling sexual exploitation of a minor, are added to Tier III of the Sexual Offenders Registry.

"We must stand united in our commitment to combat sex and human trafficking," House Speaker Dean Plocher, R-Des Peres, said. "By enhancing prevention, strengthening prosecution, and supporting survivors, we are taking significant strides towards protecting the vulnerable and prosecuting those who exploit them. Together, we can build a future where every person's dignity and rights are upheld, and where the chains of trafficking are broken forever."

The bill will now move to the Senate for consideration, where lawmakers are expected to continue their bipartisan efforts to combat trafficking and protect vulnerable individuals.

Representative Jeff Myers, a Republican, represents Warren and Montgomery Counties (District 42) in the Missouri House of Representatives. He was elected to his first two-year term in November 2022. For more information, please contact Rep. Myers' office at 573-751-2689 or by email at Jeff.Myers@House.Mo.Gov.

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