



# Freedom Network USA

## **FNUSA Statement of Opposition to HR 2601**

### **National Human Trafficking Hotline Enhancement Act**

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**Freedom Network USA (FNUSA), the nation's largest alliance of human trafficking survivors, service providers, and advocates, is firmly opposed to HR 2601 in its entirety and any amendments to the bill. *HR2601 should not pass Congress in any form.***

The bill will divert resources away from survivors, delay their access to critical services, erode trust in services and support, and harm the very survivors it should be helping. Any requirement for tips from the hotline to be reported to law enforcement will result in physical and emotional harm to survivors. Survivors have been advocating for agency and autonomy in access to services and engagement with law enforcement for over 23 years. This would undermine decades of efforts to increase safety for survivors.

Requiring the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) to both connect survivors with services and serve as a law enforcement tipline is inherently a conflict of interest and unethical. Most hotlines only serve the purpose of providing services and support for callers. The National Domestic Violence Hotline, RAINN's Sexual Assault Helpline, and the National Runaway Safeline, for example, are effective because they do not provide tips to law enforcement about domestic violence, sexual assault, or runaway youth. Their resources are dedicated solely to meeting the needs of survivors. They are not advertised as law enforcement tiplines and, in turn, are not overburdened with calls from members of the general public like the NHTH.

It should never be assumed that survivors want to report their cases to law enforcement. Many survivors are working to avoid law enforcement due to: previous harmful interactions, traffickers that threaten retaliation, or the vulnerable immigration status of the survivor or family member. Reporting to law enforcement without explicit consent erodes the trust of survivors and may push them away from the very services they need to leave a trafficking situation. Survivors who have reported that they were unexpectedly contacted by law enforcement after contacting the NHTH have lost trust in the systems that should be meeting their needs.

Without a guarantee of confidentiality, survivors will not trust the NHTH, leading to delays in finding the services and support they need. Delays in access to services like housing, healthcare and mental health care, safety planning, and legal services can put survivors in unsafe situations for longer periods. Survivors will be forced to remain in trafficking situations while searching for services. Some will give up and believe that help is not available.

The NHTH is not required by law to operate as a tipline, but has served this dual purpose for most of its existence. The NHTH has received significant numbers of calls from the general public that do not report real cases of human trafficking. These calls overburden the hotline and prevent survivors from speaking to a hotline advocate. The general public knows how to call the

police and can do so using the local non-emergency number, 911, FBI, or DHS tiplines, leaving the NHTH open for the survivors it is intended to serve.

This legislation will only result in fewer survivors being able to access the resources they need and a growing lack of trust in the NHTH. The NHTH should act only as a resource for survivors seeking safety. Survivors must be empowered with the tools to recover and make their own decisions to involve law enforcement when and if they feel comfortable doing so.