

# ATEST Joins Anti-trafficking Movement Call to Oppose Proposed New Requirements for National Hotline

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Dear Members of Congress:

When survivors of violence or crime are deciding whether to reach out for help, they are often scared, unsure who they can trust, and taking a huge leap of faith. Knowing that they can choose when, how, and if they want to report their situation to law enforcement is a fundamental part of honoring their consent in ways their traffickers never have.

H.R.2601 is a bill that would turn the National Human Trafficking Hotline into a law enforcement tip line. Since it is a standard practice to not automatically report to law enforcement in other kinds of hotlines (like suicide and self-harm, sexual violence, and domestic violence), survivors who need help may be confused about who they can trust for confidential, victim-centered support. Survivors deserve access to a victim-centered hotline, and H.R.2601 would deprive them of that, with detrimental impacts on survivors.

Consider the following concerns, each of which is expanded on with examples and citations in the [National Survivor Network's March 2023 response](#) to this issue.

- Many victims of trafficking do not report what is happening to

them due to fear of law enforcement, and many trafficking survivors' fears of law enforcement are entirely reasonable. Too many survivors and people from marginalized communities have been harassed, profiled, or assaulted by law enforcement, or know that reporting will put their loved ones at risk of violence.

- Automatically involving law enforcement without survivor consent will disproportionately harm the communities at the highest risk of human trafficking, which increases their vulnerability to many forms of violence and exploitation.
- A hotline can *either* be for survivors *or* to increase policing and prosecution, but trying to be both is a conflict of interest. Many survivors will not call a hotline they know may report automatically to law enforcement. And hiding this information so they won't know until they've disclosed? That just reinforces the message that other people can trick them in order to get something from them.
- Misinformation, sensationalism, and racialized bias in anti-trafficking "awareness" has confused the public about what trafficking is, and engaging law enforcement based on every second-hand report will create racialized and gendered harassment of vulnerable communities, including through "swatting." (See: [NBC News](#))
- Hotline calls are an unreliable source of data about human trafficking, which can then impact funding for resources. H.R.2601's chilling effect on calls to the hotline will further confuse the public (as well as legislators) about what kinds of services are needed and at what level. Additionally, high call levels of tips cause longer waits for people reaching out for help.
- A hotline geared towards supporting victims ultimately benefits criminal legal engagement *for those survivors who choose to report*, when they have had time to process their fears and plan for

their own and their loved ones' safety with a trained hotline counselor.

Survivors of human trafficking deserve victim-centered hotlines where they can receive support, learn about their options, and receive referrals to needed local services to help them in their journeys. They should not have to worry about mandatory reporting to law enforcement except in the most extreme of cases – cases that are often already covered under existing mandatory reporting laws.

Public awareness efforts that misrepresent the role of the hotline as a place to send tips to law enforcement are misleading and confusing. **However, to replace the national hotline with a national or state "hotline" that automatically reports to law enforcement is equally misleading and *more damaging*, and will erode trafficking victim's already-shaky trust in systems when they call for help and instead are funneled into non-consensual engagement with law enforcement**

We urge you to continue to support a national hotline **for survivors**. We cannot place the pressure of prosecution over the need to get services to the people who need it most. **We oppose H.R.2601 and any efforts to roll it into other life-saving, essential legislation.**

Sincerely,

**Individuals (\* indicates willingness to disclose lived experience)**

- Sara Aguilar, Survivor Advocate\*
- Chris Ash, Survivor Leadership Program Manager at the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking\*
- Susie Baldwin, MD, MPH, FACPM
- Norma Bastidas\*

- Chris Bates, overcomeexploitation.com\*
- Rafael Bautista, Vice-chair of the US Advisory Council on Human Trafficking\*
- Sabra Boyd, Sabra Boyd LLC | trafficking survivor consultant, trainer, writer\*
- Elizabeth Bray, Attorney, Legal Action of Wisconsin – Human Trafficking Project
- Shesheena Bray, Program Director, me too. International
- Heather Brown\*
- Angela R. Clark, National Survivor Network Member\*
- Daniela Deas, Founder and Executive Director, Survivors HOPE\*
- Selina Deveau, Survivor Leader and owner of Hope for Me Farm (Maine)\*
- Jaclyn Friedman, author, Yes Means Yes
- Angela Forgey , YWCA Kalamazoo Creative Design Manager
- Heather Garci Director of Grant Management YWCA Kalamazoo
- Cecilia Gentili, Founder, Trans Equity Consulting\*
- Daniel Hamilton, YWCA Kalamazoo Director of Public Policy and Advocacy
- Eric Harris, BSW, Independent contractor consultant\*
- Ron Kalemba, Member, Co-Facilitator of Learning and Training Working Group, National Survivor Network\*
- Rose Kalemba, Member, Co-Facilitator of Learning and Training Working Group, National Survivor Network\*
- Amira Kelly\*
- Lindsey King, Sexual Assault Victim Advocate
- Anne Kinsey, OMC, HMIP, Founding Executive Director, Love Powered Life\*
- Rebekah Layton M.A, National Survivor Network SETTA Coordinator\*
- Fainess Lipenga, Member of US Advisory Council on Human

## Trafficking & National Survivor Network\*

- Aubrey Lloyd, MSW, LCSW, National Anti-Trafficking Advocate\*
- alix lutnick, PhD, author of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Beyond Victims and Villains\*
- Anastasia Lyng, Membership and Community Working Group Co-Facilitator, National Survivor Network\*
- Zachary Mallory\*
- Billie Jo McIntire, MA, LPC, LAC, CHTT, EMDRIA, CST, CCT, CMFT, CTAT, CCS\*
- Nikita Mitchell, Chief Strategy Officer, me too. International
- Carlyne Ouya, Program Manager – Futures Without Violence
- Rachel Ostergaard, LCSW, Program Manager, Salvation Army STOP IT rogram
- Nat Paul
- Kayti Pohlman, LMSW, Survivor Therapist
- Julissa Ponce\*
- Haley Price, Member, National Survivor Network\*
- Rachel Robitz, MD
- Dawn Schiller, Training Director, LA County Project (CAST)\*
- Marci Schrock, Direct Service Supervisor, Anti-trafficking Project
- Helen Stiver\*
- Andy Stowers\*
- Charlie Tebow, LMSW, Survivor Leader and Therapist\*
- Jess Torres, Policy and Community Development Specialist / Rising Worldwide Program Manger\*
- Kate Vander Tuig, Health Program Manager, Futures Without Violence
- Emily Warfield, MSW, LMSW\*
- Dunia Zelaya, Survivor Advocate at the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking\*

## **National Organizations**

- Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST)
- ASISTA Immigration Assistance
- EducateUS: SIECUS In Action
- Freedom Network USA
- Give Way to Freedom
- HEAL Trafficking
- Human Trafficking Legal Center
- Love Powered Life
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline
- National Network to End Domestic Violence
- National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Assault
- The National Survivor Network
- Reframe Health and Justice
- Tahirih Justice Center

## **State, Regional, and Local Organizations**

- AO Advocating Opportunity
- Chains Interrupted
- Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking
- Florida Legal Services, Inc.
- Justice At Last
- JusticeMatters, Inc.
- LIPS Tampa (lipstampa.org)
- Preble Street
- Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative
- WOMANKIND