



June 12, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
2468 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
2433 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker McCarthy, and Minority Leader Jeffries,

We write to you to express concern about H.R. 2601, the National Human Trafficking Hotline Enhancement Act. This bill would require that the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) share personally-identifying information about victims of human trafficking with law enforcement agencies, without the knowledge or consent of victims.

We believe that H.R. 2601 is well intentioned, and we support the implicit goals of ensuring that traffickers are prosecuted and punished for their crimes and that victims are freed from servitude. However, we believe the unintended consequence of this bill's mandate is that victims would be discouraged from reaching out to the hotline in the first place. (All comments in this letter relate to adult victims; we fully support existing state and federal requirements that mandate reporting of the suspected abuse of children and vulnerable adults.)

RAINN operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (NSAH), which helps hundreds of thousands of sexual violence victims each year. While the services of the NSAH differ from those of the trafficking hotline, we face similar challenges in winning the trust of prospective hotline users.

In many surveys over the last 29 years, sexual violence victims have told us that the single most important attribute of the NSAH is that it guarantees anonymity to victims. Without that guarantee, quite simply, as many as half of hotline users would decline to use the service. Many victims reaching out to the NSAH say that they've never told a single person about the assault they experienced before disclosing the assault to our staff.

A requirement that a hotline collect PII of victims and, without asking for consent, share such information with police, will be a frightening prospect for many victims. It would certainly discourage calls to the NHTH. A lack of trust in NHTH would also be likely to harm trust in other national hotlines, such as the NSAH.

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afflicting, robs victims of their agency and autonomy. Part of the role of a hotline is to help victims restore that sense of agency. We frequently get questions about the criminal justice system, and work hard to provide the information that victims need to make an informed choice about reporting. Academic studies have shown that victims who receive such hotline support are more likely to ultimately report to police than victims who did not receive help. Based on that, it is quite possible that H.R. 2601 could end up *decreasing* the number of reports to police, by discouraging victims from reaching out in the first place.

We support every victim's decision to report to the police. But this decision must be left to each individual victim. Nearly every victim knows that calling 911 is an option. If they made the choice to, instead, reach out to a hotline for support, we owe it to them to respect that choice. They are best able to assess the threats they are facing and the potential consequences of involving law enforcement. Survivors should have the power to determine when — and if — law enforcement is notified. Allowing survivors to make this decision is critical to their healing process and is the first step in taking back their agency after surviving an incident of sexual violence.

We have worked for many years with each of your offices, and each of you have been consistent and reliable supporters of legislation to support victims of sexual violence and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. However well intentioned, we believe that H.R. 2601 would advance neither of those goals, and we ask you to oppose this bill.

Sincerely,



Scott Berkowitz

President, RAINN