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Statement on H.R. 7137, the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act

One year into my first term in Congress, I learned of the tragic plight of 11 Filipino workers in my district who had been trafficked for their labor. Their abusers forced them to work long hours in a bakery with horrid conditions that amounted to modern day slavery. The workers were paid starvation wages as low as \$300 a month.

Once I became aware of this shocking abuse, I worked hard to secure visas for these survivors, so they could stay in the United States and rebuild their lives.

We know that tragedies like this one are all too common, and in the years since, I have committed myself to standing with survivors and working with my colleagues to ensure that Congress continues to do more.

I am grateful that the House Judiciary Committee is considering H.R. 7137, the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act today. This markup is the culmination of almost a decade of tireless organizing by persistent advocates and brave survivors who had the courage to share their stories.

I am pleased to be a co-lead of this impactful legislation, which will give trafficking survivors the opportunity to overcome past traumas and work toward a brighter future.

The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act will create a pathway for survivors of human trafficking to have non-violent convictions or arrests vacated if those offenses were tied to their abuse. This legislation comes on the heels of dozens of measures in statehouses across the country – including in California – that similarly expunges state-level offenses.

Last year, the National Human Trafficking Hotline identified over 9,500 human trafficking cases in the United States, with almost 17,000 victims affected. Even when they are rescued, many survivors face daunting barriers in the criminal justice system. One national study found that 71 percent of survivors have a criminal record, often as a result of being deceived or forced into illegal activity. This record can unfairly prevent those survivors from being able to find a job, secure housing, or receive government benefits.

The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act will finally allow our criminal justice system to recognize the painful trauma that survivors experience and let those individuals move on with their lives. The bill will also streamline our court system to target real risks to public safety –

rather than vulnerable survivors – which is why the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act is supported not only by survivor advocacy organizations, but law enforcement groups as well.

I strongly urge my colleagues to stand with survivors and support this bill. Additionally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues from across the aisle – Congressman Russell Fry and Congresswoman Ann Wagner – for their bipartisan partnership on this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ted W. Lieu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ted W. Lieu

Member of Congress