



Aisha Braveboy
State's Attorney

MEDIA ADVISORY

March 14, 2023

For Immediate Release

MARYLAND STATE'S ATTORNEYS JOIN FORCES TO PROTECT VICTIMS OF CHILD SEX ABUSE AND TRAFFICKING

Howard, Frederick, Montgomery & Prince George's Counties stand together to urge Maryland Legislature to pass Senate Bill 21 & Senate Bill 292

ANNAPOLIS, MD – Today, Maryland State's Attorneys for Frederick, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties held a joint press conference today to urge passage of multiple bills currently before the Maryland General Assembly.

Principal speakers at the press conference included Howard County State's Attorney Richard Gibson Jr. (president of the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association); Frederick County State's Attorney Charlie Smith (president-elect of the National District Attorney's Association); Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy and Prince George's County State's Attorney Aisha Braveboy. The State's Attorneys were also joined by Turn Around Inc. and several advocacy groups and victims of related crimes.

The press conference specifically discussed the following two pieces of legislation:

1. House Bill 226/Senate Bill 21: Criminal Law - Person in a Position of Authority - Sexual Offenses With a Minor. This bill would strengthen the prosecution of child sex abuse by expanding the definition of "Person in a Position of Authority" to coaches, counselors, and teachers outside the school system who utilize their position to victimize children.
2. House Bill 297/Senate Bill 292: Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response. This bill would ensure that child trafficking victims are not prosecuted for their own victimization and instead are referred to proper services through the Regional Navigator Program.

On February 24, 2023, the Safe Harbor bill was voted favorably out of the House of Delegates. Currently, it remains in Judicial Proceedings on the Senate side where no action has been taken.

The Person in a Position of Authority bill passed out of the House of Delegates on March 9, 2023. Currently, a hearing has not been scheduled by Judicial Proceedings.

"I think it's very important to highlight the bills that prosecutors of this state are supporting. There's been a lot of talk publicly about the legislation we are against and what is often ignored is the legislation we fully endorse," said Howard County State's Attorney Rich Gibson, Jr. "We stand firmly against any bills that we feel would jeopardize public safety. And likewise, we're here today talking about bills that would enhance public safety. It is for these reasons that we stand in solidarity; not only for these two specific bills, but for the 50-plus bills put forth on our MSAA support list."

"Many persons in positions of authority over minors are excluded from the current law. SB21 expands the definition of person in position of authority to include teachers, coaches, counselors, and others who work with children outside of the traditional school setting. Individuals who are in any of the roles included in this bill hold positions of trust, and any person who grooms or manipulates a child for the purposes of sexual exploitation should be held accountable," said Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy.

"The Legislature is being urged to pass Senate Bill 292, the Safe Harbor Bill. This bill is a step in the right direction to enhance protections for child victims of human trafficking and sex trafficking. The passage of this bill will provide immunity from prosecution or juvenile proceedings for child victims who are suspected of being survivors of these heinous crimes. Under current law, many child victims are charged with crimes or are subject to juvenile proceedings—even when they are suspected to be survivors of human or sex trafficking. The Safe Harbor Bill would provide protection from such charges and proceedings to shield these children from further trauma," said Prince George's County State's Attorney Aisha Braveboy. "It is time for us to come together and act on behalf of those who cannot advocate for themselves. Let us make sure that we keep our focus on safety and healing, not punishment and prosecution. Now more than ever we must ensure that our most vulnerable population—children—are protected from traffickers who seek to exploit them for profit."

Frederick County State's Attorney Charlie Smith commented, "It is critical that we do everything in our power to stand as advocates for victims of crime, both on the State and National level. The Safe Harbor Bill would ensure that child victims are protected from prosecution and that traffickers become the sole focus of law enforcement, as they should." Smith added, "There are far too many that use their trusted relationship with children to groom and abuse. By expanding the definition of those in positions of authority, we will ensure that more offenders are held accountable for victimizing children. I call on the General Assembly to pass these bills that will protect the vulnerable."

☎ 301-780-8206



Denise Douglas
Director of Communications



dadouglas@co.pg.md.us

Office of the State's Attorney, Prince George's County