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**House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence, E2.016**

**Human Trafficking Testimony**

**April 17, 2007**

My name is Jennifer Carr and I am testifying on behalf of the Texas Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Texas. We support HB 3370, HB 3371, HB 3372, HB 3373, HB 3374 because they would:

1. Increase community awareness and understanding of this crime.
2. Increase law enforcement awareness and understanding of how to identify victims and distinguish them as victims rather than charge them as criminals;
3. Warn traffickers who recruit, harbor, transport or use victims thru or in Texas or use Texas as a port of entry or destination point, that they will be prosecuted.

First, a concise definition of human trafficking as defined by the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection act of 2000:

Human trafficking is:

- A. **Sex trafficking** in which a commercial sex act is induced by **force, fraud, or coercion**, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age, OR
- B. **The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion** for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery

The Catholic Church is in a unique position to assist in efforts to end human trafficking through our extensive global network of churches and service organizations. Catholic Charities offices throughout Texas assist in providing services to victims of Human Trafficking. Our experience has taught us that victims do not identify themselves to authorities because of the psychological torture used by their traffickers. For example, one of the sex trafficking victims that we served stated that traffickers will provide their victims with a rosary and tell them to pray for their dead mothers. If a victim states that his or her mother isn't dead, the trafficker threatens, "Well she will be if you try to escape." Next, the trafficker shows the victims a video of neighbors or loved ones being tortured or murdered to ensure compliance. I have seen the pictures and they are horrific. This is an example of the force and coercion used in sex trafficking.

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However, often unmentioned are the thousands of victims of labor trafficking in this country. I facilitated a focus group discussion on trafficking with intake workers at a Catholic food pantry in Houston. After two hours of discussion of the definition of human trafficking and signs to assist in victim identification, staff of the food pantry reported no victims had sought assistance at their doors. At the very end of the discussion, one intake worker asked me if I had any ideas on how to assist all of the men coming to the food pantry who weren't being paid for their work. I asked a few more questions to understand the situation and this is what I encountered. Immigrant men were brought to the United States by traffickers who promised U.S. citizenship, and high wages. During the process, their passports and identification papers were taken to "file citizenship" papers for them. Then, they were forced to work long hours for no pay for many months while "working off their debt and waiting for their immigration papers to be processed." They were told that they could not report this to law enforcement because they would be arrested and deported. These men were victims of human trafficking; de-frauded of their documents, forced into unpaid labor, and coerced to conceal this from authorities. It took a great deal of training for the intake staff to understand the definition and would take many months more for the men to come to trust the staff enough to open up about their situation. Two weeks after focus group discussion, the men simply disappeared and stopped coming for food.

Identifying victims requires community awareness and visibility of rescue hotline numbers in order to facilitate rescues. We support all efforts to educate and inform Texans about the horrific crime of human trafficking and resources available to assist victims.

Thank you for your support of these bills.

For questions on this testimony, please contact Jennifer Carr at 512-339-9882 or [jen@txcatholic.org](mailto:jen@txcatholic.org).

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