



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Van Wanggaard, Chair  
Members, Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: February 21, 2024

RE: Support for SB 940, SB 942, SB 945, SB 946, SB 949, SB 954, SB 960, SB 961,  
Human Trafficking

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On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the bishops of Wisconsin, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the following bills being heard in this committee today:

SB 940, Mandatory Training Regarding Human Trafficking  
SB 942, Human Trafficking of Adults at Risk for the Purpose of Commercial Sex Acts  
SB 945, Sex Offender Registration for Certain Crimes  
SB 946, Testimony of a Child in a Criminal Proceeding for a Human Trafficking Crime  
SB 949, Courtroom Supports and Sealing Identity of Child Victims and Witnesses  
SB 954, Creation of a Human Trafficking Council  
SB 960, Instruction on Human Trafficking in Certain Specialty Schools (Barbering)  
SB 961, Human Trafficking Victim Services Grant Program

Human trafficking constitutes one of the gravest offenses against basic human rights and dignity. It preys upon the most vulnerable men, women, and children, who are frequently coerced into performing the most degrading forms of human labor. It denies everything that a civilized society stands for and that Catholic social teaching espouses: the protection of human dignity and human rights; the preferential option for the poor; the call to family and community; the rights of workers; and solidarity.

As of 2022, it is estimated that over 27 million people are victims of human trafficking.<sup>1</sup> This can take the form of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, coerced and forced labor, child soldiers, and more. That number includes more than 3.3 million children. In Wisconsin specifically, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reports nearly 800 cases involving over 1,600 victims with the vast majority suffering from sex trafficking.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*, (September 2022)  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms\\_854733.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Spectrum News 1, *How big of a problem is sex trafficking in Wisconsin?* (April 24, 2023)  
<https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2023/04/19/part-1--how-big-of-a-problem-is-sex-trafficking-in-wisconsin->

The Catholic Church, along with other religious and secular institutions, is involved in combating human trafficking both nationally and internationally. In the U.S., the Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking, which consists of about twenty Catholic organizations, was one of the groups that helped draft the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations.<sup>3</sup> Catholic women religious have been at the forefront of anti-trafficking work.<sup>4</sup> They and countless other lay Catholics reach out directly to persons who are being trafficked to help with housing, transportation, childcare, employment, etc. In Milwaukee, the newly established St. Bakhita House, in partnership with Franciscan Peacemakers Clare Community, provides supportive community housing for women who are seeking to escape sex trafficking. Across Wisconsin, among people of every faith, awareness is growing that sex trafficking is destroying lives and wreaking havoc on families and communities.

The WCC, therefore, applauds those involved with the bipartisan task force for bringing forward these bills. These bills strive to give victims of human trafficking some hope that they will be delivered from their bondage and help prevent others from being ensnared in this violent and degrading world. We strongly urge the Legislature to pass these bills.

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<sup>3</sup> The Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking (CCOAHT), <https://www.usccb.org/offices/anti-trafficking-program/coalition-catholic-organizations-against-human-trafficking>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, <https://sistersagainsttrafficking.org>