



Assembly Member **SANDRÉ SWANSON**
News Release

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Enhanced Fines For Human Traffickers Advances With Unanimous Vote

Legislation also enables seizure of criminal assets, funds aid organizations

(Sacramento)—Assemblymember Sandré R. Swanson (D—Alameda) won passage of a key piece of human trafficking legislation yesterday. AB 17, the Human Trafficking Penalties Act, is another in a series of bills he has introduced to combat the human trafficking of minors. AB 17 passed the Assembly Public Safety Committee on a unanimous and bipartisan 7-0 vote with significant support from law enforcement, community and victims support organizations.

AB 17 would enhance financial penalties for those convicted of human trafficking and allow law enforcement to seize assets connected to traffickers. Significantly, half of the monies collected from fines and seizures would be made solely available to community based organizations that serve underage victims of human trafficking.

“Trafficking children for sexual activities is a profitable underground enterprise with high demand. In fact, commercial sexual exploitation of minors is a growing epidemic in our State, particularly given that financial penalties against traffickers are not sufficient to stem the growing trade in underage youth. That is why we need to take the profit motive out of this criminal enterprise.” charged Assemblymember Swanson.

AB 17 contains three provisions, two of which would target assets generated by human trafficking. Individuals convicted of trafficking of a minor would be fined up to \$20,000 per count, four times higher than the current \$5,000 fine. Judges also have the ability to add additional penalties, driving up the final value to approximately \$76,000, according to the Public Safety Committee analysis. Additionally, the bill adds the crime of procurement of a minor to the Criminal Enterprise statute, which enables law enforcement to seize the assets of those convicted of procuring or trafficking of a minor.

“Minors make up 71% of all sex crimes. Hitting offenders in the pocketbook will enable us to curb this criminal activity,” testified Ms. Dawn Koepke, who represents the Child Abuse Prevention Center, which supports the bill.

Also testifying on behalf of the bill were the parents of a 14 year old girl, who was abducted and forced into prostitution, where she was exploited by the growing use of the internet to market children. Mr. Wayne Wright and Gina Bentley testified before the committee, expressing their strong support for the bill.

“Our daughter went missing for over six months, and was trafficked through cities across the nation. We later found that the pimp who trafficked her was buying condos and luxury cars from the money he made off of girls like our daughter,” said Mr. Wright.

Additionally, AB 17 would dedicate half of the funds raised from these fines and seizures to community based nonprofit organizations that help underage victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Mrs. Wright described to the committee the challenges they faced in securing help for their daughter. "We were shocked at how little help was available. We strongly believe that people who are willing to destroy these young lives should lose their assets. Those funds should be dedicated to helping girls like my daughter escape and recover from these terrible situations," she stated.

Others in support of the bill included: The California Commission on the Status of Women, the Child Abuse Prevention Center, the California Family Council, Crime Victims United of California, the City of West Hollywood, and Concerned Women of America.

"Human trafficking of girls for commercial sexual exploitation is at the forefront of the new underground economy. Countless drug traffickers are moving into this trade to escape the heavy penalties for dealing drugs. It is time that we remove the profit motive from these criminal enterprises, put these predators out of business, and properly fund the organizations that rescue these innocent children," concluded a determined Assemblymember Swanson.

AB 17 joins its companion legislation, AB 16, in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. AB 16 seeks to add a strike to the offense of human trafficking under California's "Three Strikes" sentencing law.

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