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OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL NO. 111

A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO SEX TRAFFICKING

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at 9:45 a.m.
Via Videoconference
State Capitol Conference Room 016
415 South Beretania Street

Honorable Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary. The County of Hawai'i, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney submits the following testimony in support of House Bill No. 111

This bill was drafted with the intent to authorize civil claims to be made against a person, business, business owner, or business operator that profits from sexual exploitation or sex trafficking. Extends the statute of limitations for civil claims related to sexual exploitation or sex trafficking to ten years.

House Bill 111 takes crucial steps toward creating a legal framework that better supports victims, holds perpetrators accountable, and prevents further exploitation. Sexual exploitation is a devastating crime that not only strips individuals of their autonomy but also inflicts long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological harm.

Allowing civil claims to be made against individuals or businesses that profit from sex trafficking and sexual exploitation is an essential step toward ensuring that those who facilitate these crimes are held legally responsible. This measure will create an avenue for survivors to seek justice and recover damages for the suffering they have endured. Extending the statute of limitations to ten years for civil claims related to sexual exploitation will provide the necessary time for survivors, who may take years to heal, to seek reparations.

In conclusion, HB 111 represents a necessary step toward dismantling the systems that enable sexual exploitation. This bill supports those who have suffered from these crimes, particularly those from vulnerable communities, and sends a clear message that we stand firm against sexual exploitation in our state.

The County of Hawai‘i, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney is dedicated to pursuing justice with integrity and commitment. By passing this bill, we will send a strong message that Hawai‘i will not tolerate the exploitation of the most vulnerable, and we will actively work to protect and support survivors of sexual exploitation. For these reasons, the County of Hawai‘i, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney supports the passage of House Bill No. 111. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.



HB 111, RELATING TO SEX TRAFFICKING

MARCH 11, 2025 · JDC HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: Imua Alliance supports HB 111, relating to sex trafficking, which authorizes civil claims to be made against a person, business, business owner, or business operator that profits from sexual exploitation or sex trafficking; and extends the statute of limitations for civil claims related to sexual exploitation or sex trafficking to ten years.

Imua Alliance is a victim service provider for survivors of sex trafficking. Over the past 15 years, we have provided comprehensive direct intervention services to over 200 victims, successfully emancipating them from slavery and assisting in their restoration, while providing a range of targeted services to over 1,000 victims and individuals at risk of sexual exploitation. **During the pandemic, demand for victim services to our organization has skyrocketed by 330 percent, driven in part by a fivefold increase in direct crisis calls from potential trafficking victims.**

Each of the victims we have assisted has suffered from complex and overlapping trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety, dissociation, parasuicidal behavior, and substance abuse. Trafficking-related trauma can lead to a complete loss of identity. A victim we cared for in 2016, for example, had become so heavily trauma bonded to her pimp that while under his grasp, she couldn't remember her own name. Yet, sadly, many of the victims with whom we work are misidentified as so-called "voluntary prostitutes" and are subsequently arrested and incarcerated, with no financial resources from which to pay for their release.

Sex trafficking is a profoundly violent crime. At least 23 percent of trafficking victims in Hawai'i report being first exploited before turning 18, according to a recent report, with the average age of trafficked keiki's initial exposure to exploitation being 11. Based on regular outreach and monitoring, we estimate that approximately 150 high-risk sex trafficking establishments operate in Hawai'i. In a recent report conducted by the State Commission on the Status of Women, researchers from Arizona State University found that 1 in every 11 adult males living in our state buys sex online. When visitors are also counted, that number worsens to 1 in every 7 men walking the streets of our island home and a daily online sex buyer market of 18,614 for O'ahu and a total sex buyer population for the island of 74,362, including both tourists and residents.

ASU's findings are grim, but not surprising to local organizations that provide services to survivors of sex trafficking. Imua Alliance, for example, has trained volunteers to perform outreach to victims in high-risk locations, like strip clubs, massage parlors, and hostess bars. More than 80 percent of runaway youth report being approached for sexual exploitation while on the run, over 30 percent of whom are targeted within the first 48 hours of leaving home. With regard to mental health, sex trafficking victims are twice as likely to suffer from PTSD as a soldier in a war zone.

Greater than 80 percent of victims report being repeatedly raped and 95 percent report being physically assaulted, numbers that are underreported, according to the United States Department of State and numerous trauma specialists, because of the inability of many victims to recognize sexual violence. As one underage survivor told Imua Alliance prior to being rescued, "I can't be raped. Only good girls can be raped. I'm a bad girl. If I *want* to be raped, I have to *earn* it."

Accordingly, **we support measures to advance our state's fight against sexual servitude, including this bill's effort to empower survivors to pursue civil claims against businesses that willingly turn a blind eye to exploitation that happens on their premises.** Too often, the owners and operators of such businesses are allowed to escape culpability for their role in facilitating sex trafficking, as they overlook exploitation to pad their profit margins.

Contact us at imuaalliance.org/contact



Committee on Judiciary
Chair Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair Mike Gabbard

March 11, 2025 at March 11, 2025 at 5 a.m. in CR 016 & Videoconference
HB 111 - Prostitution; Sexual Exploitation; Sex Trafficking; Civil Claims

TESTIMONY

Stephen Munkelt, Legislative Committee, League of Women Voters of Hawaii

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Committee Members:

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii supports BILL NUMBER HB 111

This bill clarifies and expands the definitions of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking as they apply to grounds for a civil suit against persons who have benefitted from exploitation or trafficking. It also makes adjustments to the statute of limitations which allow more time for claimants to file suit.

The League of Women Voters opposes all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The League also believes victims of exploitation should be provided support and resources to assist their recovery from that harm. HB 111 provides a means for victims to seek compensation from exploiters, which can promote healing. HB 111 also expands the potential consequences to exploiters as a deterrent to engaging in these activities. For these reasons the League of Women Voters of Hawaii **supports HB 111.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Stephen Munkelt
Legislative Committee

HB-111

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 7:42:06 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/11/2025 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nadine Ortega	Testifying for Tagnawa (Mutual Aid)	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass H.B. 111.

Tagnawa is an environmental disaster response and recovery organization focused on the intersection of Filipino wellbeing and women's rights. Research shows that environmental catastrophes increase the risk of sex trafficking to fire survivors. This bill, if passed, would create an important deterrent to exploitation of fire survivors and a route to accountability and healing for victims without relying on and burdening the criminal justice system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 111.

Mahalo,

Nadine Ortega, J.D.

Executive Director



LATE

SEX WORKERS OUTREACH PROJECT OF HAWAI'I

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO [HB111](#)

Senate Committee on Judiciary
March 10th, 2025

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee,

We are the **Sex Workers Outreach Project of Hawai'i, a group of people with lived experience providing material support to sex workers across the islands.** Our main on the ground work is a weekly offering of food, harm reduction supplies, and general support to community members in need; we also host wellness and educational events, and connect individuals in need with financial resources as well as mutual aid. Our work also includes advocating for policies that would help rather than harm the community members we serve.

We oppose HB111, to establish and expand civil liability by amending Chapter 663J of the Hawaii Revised Statutes (the "Liability for Coercion into Prostitution" statute), and also offer the following comments.

While SWOP strongly supports protections for survivors of trafficking and sex workers alike, **we feel called to address the real and important distinction between sex work and sex trafficking.** We understand that this is not a distinction that is reflected by current definitions in statutes, and we are committed to fighting for this to be changed in the years to come.

In this bill, **the repeated references to "sexual exploitation" could easily be replaced with "sex trafficking" to achieve the goal of penalizing businesses, organizations, and individuals who actively perpetuate harm in our communities.** Making groups and people scared to support a sex worker at all further isolates and endangers already marginalized individuals.

Having sex, and making or offering payment from one's labor, are not inherently harmful. Human rights advocates across the world recommend **full decriminalization of sex work**, after the New Zealand model, which has **proven successful in creating a better relationship between sex workers and law enforcement**. This also **lessens worries for someone seeking medical help**, whose attempts are either discouraged by criminalization, or hampered by stigma, leading to poorly-informed care. Relative to this conversation is the fact that even the American Medical Association's Journal of Ethics published a [study](#) that concludes **human trafficking could be decreased through sex work decriminalization**. The same sentiment is shared by several human rights and medical organizations, including Amnesty international, ACLU, WHO, Human Rights Watch, Freedom Network USA, Global Alliance Against Trafficking of Women, and more.

[Here](#) is a link to our "Decrim to End Trafficking" zine on our social media, if you would like more information.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

SWOP Hawai'i

HB-111

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 8:50:50 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/11/2025 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Frank Schultz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this initiative.

Everyone involved in human trafficking should be held accountable and victims should be able to sue for compensation for their pain and suffering.

HB-111

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 11:36:32 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/11/2025 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dara Carlin, M.A.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Stand in Support

LATE

HB-111

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 8:44:40 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/11/2025 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Abellanida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. Stop human trafficking.