



To: Members of the Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Workforce Development and Economic Opportunities
Rep. Petryk, Chairman

From: Kathi Kilgore, WHLA Contract Lobbyist

Date: January 24, 2024

Re: Support for Assembly Bill 973 Relating to: mandatory training regarding human trafficking for employees of community-based residential facilities and owners of certain entities and certain other employees and granting rule-making authority.

As January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, I'm happy to be here on behalf of approximately 600 members of the Wisconsin Hotel & Lodging Association, including hotels, motels, resorts, bed and breakfasts, and all of the businesses that support our industry, we thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on Assembly Bill 973, which would require training for owners and managers of Wisconsin's hotels and motels. We are here today in support of this bill; however, we are asking for the opportunity to work with you to make the bill more robust, more straightforward, and more effective.

Wisconsin's lodging industry has been proactively working to fight human trafficking for years, and we have invested quite an amount of time and resources into the effort. Through the American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation's No Room for Trafficking initiative, we support the free distribution of industry-standard courses effectively designed to help eradicate human trafficking from the lodging industry. The first course, "Your Role in Preventing Human Trafficking: Recognize the Signs," is available in 17 different languages and can be delivered online or in person. The second, "Recognize and Respond: Addressing Human Trafficking in the Hospitality Industry," builds on the foundation of the first course and provides increased guidance on responding to potential trafficking situations. This program has a 60-minute module for associates and an 80-minute module for managers. It is delivered online and is available in Spanish, English, Chinese, Arabic, and French.

Additionally, all major brands (i.e., Marriott, Hilton, Wyndham) and the flags they represent (i.e., Fairfield Inn & Suites, DoubleTree, Super 8) have mandated human trafficking training for all of their properties throughout the United States. In Wisconsin, that means we have about 700 lodging properties with employees who have already been trained in Human Trafficking awareness and response.

We tell you this to underscore our commitment to the cause of eradicating human trafficking from our lodging facilities. Through industry experience, we would recommend consideration of the following changes:

- 1) **Types of Properties:** We know that human trafficking can occur in any type of lodging facility, not just hotels and motels. We encourage you to adopt a bill that would incorporate these requirements for all lodging establishments, including campgrounds, bed and breakfasts, tourist rooming houses, and short-term rentals (i.e., Airbnb).
- 2) **Training of Property "Owners":** While we certainly have no opposition to this concept, the implementation and interpretation may cause complications as many hotels are owned by large companies, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), etc. that do not work directly on a property like an owner operator would. We would recommend considering terms like "Principal Entity" and "Site Entity" to provide clarity.

- 3) **Identifying Traffickers:** While the outlined training requirements include guidance on how to identify individuals who are most at risk for human trafficking, our current training also includes guidance on how to **identify the signs of trafficking and individuals potentially engaged in the act of trafficking**. This is an important part of the training process, as employees do not always see the individuals being trafficked. We may want to consider including this piece of training in the bill.
- 4) **Contact Information:** The training modules that have already been developed for our industry teach people to contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Under this bill, the training needs to include "...the toll-free telephone number of the National Human Trafficking Hotline and the telephone numbers of the appropriate local law enforcement agencies." If we were to change the text to "...National Human Trafficking Hotline **or** the telephone numbers of the appropriate local law enforcement agencies..." we would protect the free training modules that are currently available to all Wisconsin lodging properties. If specific requirements exist for each municipality, the properties must pay fees to have their training customized. Without a change in this provision, we may actually be training fewer people in Wisconsin's lodging industry instead of more.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to discuss this important topic, and we look forward to having the opportunity to work with you to get an effective bill over the finish line before the end of this session.