



September 21, 2021

Regarding SB 245

Senator Wanggaard, Senator Wimberger and other esteemed members of the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety, thank you for the opportunity to speak about this important and often hidden problem of sex trafficking of youth in Wisconsin.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America advocates to protect all of God's children. The severe abuse that sex-trafficked children and youth experience is beyond what most of us can imagine. Allowing for the arrest and prosecution of youth under 18 caught in prostitution re-victimizes those young people by the systems that should be protecting them. This is the only circumstance in which we charge child sexual assault victims with a crime, either directly with prostitution charges or, and is often the case, with lighter charges such as lewd and lascivious behavior.

Wisconsin now must provide protective services for victims of sex trafficking. So let's focus on offering our young people those services, and not re-victimizing them by treating them as criminals.

A couple of years ago, we asked that you vote to have Wisconsin join the 25 other states, now it's the 34 other states, that have passed the Safe Harbor bill into law. Both states with legislatures that are predominantly Republican and ones that are predominantly Democrat have passed laws similar to SB 245.

But we have made this request several times before. Last time, we had more hope than ever that it might pass. I still don't have a clear grasp of why the Senate did not pass a similar bill as originally written the last time. There are rumors. Some say it had to do with a talk show host in Milwaukee. Some said it had to do with a person in law enforcement. What about police who support this bill? Maybe the Senate's decision to add an amendment that washed away the intent of the bill had nothing to do with either. So I am also here today to ask for more communication. If there are objections to this bill, would those who object be very clear about their reasoning sooner than later, and offer opportunities for the public to have more dialogue with you about those objections. Because a lot of us care about your decision.

Please support SB 245. And God's blessings on your work.

Pastor Cindy Crane
Director of the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin