



To: Judiciary Committee
From: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
Subject: LB516 (Human Trafficking & DHHS Services) (Support)
Date: February 22, 2019

Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church by engaging, educating, and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public. I am here today to express support for LB516 on behalf of the Conference.

From the outset of his pontificate, Pope Francis has been consistently vocal about the modern form of slavery, that is, human trafficking, which we all must combat. Pope Francis has condemned human trafficking with the strongest language, recognizing that trafficking is an “atrocious scourge,”¹ and “aberrant plague,”² and an “open wound on the body of contemporary society.”³ As he has further stated: “The human person ought never to be sold or bought as if he or she were a commodity. Whoever uses human persons in this way and exploits them, even if indirectly, becomes an accomplice of injustice.”⁴

The phenomenon of human trafficking also provides an opportunity to ask broader questions of our own personal and societal conscience: “How many times have we permitted a human being to be seen as an object, to be put on show in order to sell a product or to satisfy an immoral desire?”⁵ All of this to prompt us to recognize the fundamental fact of life that “[e]very human being, man, woman, boy and girl, is made in God’s image” and, therefore, each person deserves the respect and dignity that is theirs by right of existing as a child of God.⁶

Our state’s public policy has come a long way the last several years in recognizing the evil and crime of human trafficking and this has been a noble effort. Though we have a long way yet to go, LB516 is a step in the right direction as it provides an important opportunity to further the work of putting an end to trafficking by meeting the needs of those who have been trafficked through the provision of important governmental services. To quote Pope Francis again: “We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against [this scourge].”

¹ Pope Francis, *Greeting to the OSCE Conference* (April 3, 2017).

² Pope Francis, *Angelus* (July 30, 2017).

³ Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the International Conference on Combatting Human Trafficking* (April 10, 2014).

⁴ Pope Francis, *Message on the Occasion of the Annual Lenten ‘Fraternity Campaign’ in Brazil with the Theme of ‘Fraternity and Human Trafficking’* (March 15, 2014).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Pope Francis, *Declaration on International Day for the Abolition of Slavery* (Dec. 2, 2014).

LB516 helps ensure that our state institutions have the infrastructure and capacity for being truly effective to encounter trafficking victims and their families in their circumstances.

We would also like to acknowledge and honor all those who have their boots on the ground in the work to end human trafficking. Most especially we wish to recognize the courage of those who are survivors. Their witness is an “inexhaustible source of support for new victims[.]” Our ability to listen to their stories—and to listen to the stories of those victims who will be assisted by the Department of Health and Human Services through this legislation—will further inform our ability to encounter those who have suffered from trafficking, to meet their daily needs, and help them on the path to restoration.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference urges your support for this important legislation.