



Testimony of Mary Lee Kiernan, President & CEO of YWCA Greenwich,
on behalf of the Board of Directors of YWCA Greenwich
Before the Connecticut General Assembly
Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections
March 21, 2019

In support of:

H.B. 6742 - AN ACT CONCERNING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND STATE CONTRACTS AND THE LICENSING OF ESTHETICIANS, NAIL TECHNICIANS AND EYELASH TECHNICIANS.

Senators Flexer, Haskel, Sampson and Representatives Fox, France and Winkler, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

Thank you for your consideration of H.B. 6742, which seeks to provide protections against human trafficking in State contracts and within the health and beauty industry in our state.

This testimony will speak generally about the issue of labor trafficking and specifically about the need for licensing of estheticians, nail technicians and eyelash technicians.

This year YWCA Greenwich is celebrating its centennial. Our mission -- to eliminate racism and empower women and girls -- is as relevant today as it was 100 years ago. The issue of human trafficking falls at the intersection of empowering women and eliminating racism. Traffickers convince victims to leave their homes and countries with the promise of good paying jobs or fulfillment of a debt. The reality is that victims are often faced with threats, physical harm, substandard living conditions and no means of escape from their abusers and the nightmare situations they find themselves in. The United States and Connecticut are not immune to these crimes, and YWCA Greenwich knows this because we are treating victims of human trafficking through YWCA Greenwich Domestic Abuse Services.

In January, YWCA Greenwich hosted an important community discussion about the reality of labor trafficking around the world and closer to home in Connecticut. It is estimated that 20.1 million people worldwide are in forced labor, including children, generating \$51 billion in illegal profits resulting from forced economic exploitation, including construction, health and beauty services, restaurant workers, domestic work, landscaping, agriculture and commercial cleaning services. According to the Connecticut Department of Labor representative who spoke at our event, the top three industries where they see labor law violations are in construction, nail salons and restaurants.

While thousands of cases of trafficking are reported across the country each year, many go unreported as victims hide in the shadows. Victims don't speak out because of language barriers, fear of their traffickers, or fear of law enforcement.

The 2018 Annual Report of the Connecticut Trafficking in Persons Council stated that "a 2015 Department of Labor investigation of 25 randomly selected nail salons found that 98% of the salons were violating Connecticut labor laws. The individuals working in these salons are at high risk of labor trafficking. Additionally, because there are no training requirements and lax regulations, the health of customers and nail salon employees is also at risk."

As we saw from the sweep of nail salons in Connecticut by the Department of Labor this month, basic labor standards are still being violated. The business model for nail salons, no appointment needed, average cost of a manicure is \$12 to \$15, makes it an industry that is ripe for human trafficking and abuse of labor laws and health violations.

Connecticut is the only state in the country that does not license nail technicians and estheticians. Furthermore and in contrast, our state government already licenses and regulates barbers, cosmetologists and tattoo artists. Given the regulatory and administrative framework in place for these industries and the trafficking and public health risks cited above, it is difficult to understand why the nail industry is treated in a wholly different way.

Finally, licensing also provides a form of accreditation for nail technicians that is empowering for these individuals, who are overwhelmingly women. This type of certification recognizes and legitimizes the skills of these individuals and would contribute to the long-term economic security of these women and their families.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support H.B..6742 out of Committee and support its passage by the full General Assembly.

Thank you for your consideration.