

September 30, 2017

The Honorable Christopher Van Hollen, Jr.
United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Senator Van Hollen:

We the undersigned, on behalf of Presbyterian Women of the National Capital Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA), **strongly urge you to advocate and vote for S. 1311 and S. 1312**, pending legislation concerning the elimination of human trafficking and the protection of its victims. Ending violence against women and children has long been a goal of all PW members, and to that end we speak out here against the horrors of modern-day slavery.

As you know, the United States is not immune from labor and sex trafficking, and the impact of these terrible practices cannot be overestimated—particularly on children and youth. Despite the fact that thousands of children have been trafficked in this country, the United States is not a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children around the world—especially those who are poor, homeless, or LGBT—fall victim to traffickers all too frequently, numbering at least 5 million of the 20 to 30 million persons who may be trafficked globally each year. Children who are trafficked for their labor in any industry cannot grow and develop as children should, or receive appropriate education and health care, and they are affected psychologically for the rest of their lives. We therefore support the provisions of section 10 of S. 1311, which would emphasize that those who patronize or solicit a commercial sex act with a child should be prosecuted as federal criminal offenders, as well as the enhanced penalties that measure would provide.

The additional funding, staffing, and training that S. 1311 would provide are critical to the enforcement of federal measures against trafficking. Moreover, the studies contemplated by that bill would enhance our understanding of the impact of trafficking on its victims and of ongoing enforcement efforts. The provisions on accountability of recipients of federal grants are long overdue. Similarly, the provisions of S. 1312 focusing on services needed for trafficking survivors and on civil penalties that could be exacted on offenders are much needed. Passing these two bills—or one that combines all of these measures—would make a significant difference in the fight against trafficking in this country. This is a fight we can and must win, for the benefit of all children and adults who have survived trafficking or are at risk of being trafficked.

Though all major faiths in this country deplore human trafficking, this is a matter on which all Americans should take a stand. We reiterate our support for these two pending measures and ask that you continue to seek every possible opportunity and action with which we can stop human trafficking and to punish those who engage in it. The United States must lead the world in this battle for the sake of the rights of all human beings.

We appreciate your attention, and hope that you will act to protect and assist these vulnerable members of our society. [Signatures continue on subsequent page.]

Sincerely,