

## **REPORT ON THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING COMMITTEE OF THE LWVGT**

STATEMENT OF POSITION ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
2014 National Convention

*As adopted at the LWVUS*

The League of Women Voters opposes all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking. We consider human trafficking to be a form of modern day slavery and believe that every measure should be taken and every effort should be made through legislation and changes in public policy to prevent human trafficking. Prosecution and penalization of traffickers and abusers should be established, and existing laws should be strictly enforced. **Extensive essential services for victims should be applied where needed.** Education and awareness programs on human trafficking should be established in our communities and in our schools.

After the September, 2014 meeting of Greater Tucson's regular monthly speaker sessions -- on Human Trafficking -- a committee of interested League members and 2 outside members was formed. It was eventually decided that our focus would be on helping Victoria Steele, State Legislator from Tucson's District 9, get a bill passed. The Bill, which eventually became HB 2553, was concerned with vacating the criminal convictions of former prostitutes.

The State of Arizona applies a 99 year sentence on any prostitute's past. That basically renders them unable to 'vacate' that past, even if they can prove that they were forced into prostitution, either as a minor or beyond, committed any crime under coercion, and that, after 'escaping' or being discarded from prostitution, have led a crime-free and productive life. The burden of a felony or criminal convicted past, means that they are not an eligible recipient of any viable credit, housing, or even a decent job, as a background or fingerprint check would reveal their enslaved, but haunting past.

To make a long story shorter, Victoria's Bill did have the 'good' fortune of only being assigned to one substantive committee, a rarity for Democratic bills in this session. Human Trafficking bills have been attempted in the past, and except for HB 2454 from last session, most have not been successful. HB 2454 dealt with child prostitution, pandering, penalties for johns, massage parlors, privacy issues and established a small assistance fund. It left undone a 'safe harbor law' (a law saying that child sex trafficking victims cannot be prosecuted for prostitution), the ability for victims to sue their traffickers, a law mandating law enforcement training, and a way for trafficking victims to have their records expunged or vacated.

Victoria's HB 2553 was sent to the Judiciary Committee under the chairmanship of Edwin Farnsworth (District 12). The bill was then, in the eyes of its advocates, 'gutted'. The re-written bill limits the convictions that can be vacated to convictions prior to 1/1/15 rather than convictions for all nondangerous offenses whenever they may have occurred. It requires proof by clear and convincing evidence rather than a preponderance of evidence. It does not 'seal' records, thus leaving them publically available. Fingerprints are still tied to past convictions. There are more legal ramifications, none of them supportive of a trafficking victim's offenses participation in crime being identified as a result of trafficking.

Nonetheless, the passage of the Bill, eventually by both houses and signed into law by the Governor, was a significant step. And next year, another attempt will be made for more significant legislation relating to the 'vacating of convictions' of trafficking victims.

The League's involvement was aided immensely by collaboration with AAUW. Sharon Hettick, AAUW's Public Policy Chair in Arizona, gave us invaluable information and help and allowed us to follow their lead and in-roads, both with Victoria and with the Legislature. Along the way, as a result of one of our committee members attending another Human Trafficking forum in Green Valley, we collaborated with

the United Methodist Women of Green Valley. Both AAUW and UMW have strong national positions on Human Trafficking. In all honesty, without Sharon's AAUW moving train, we might still be waiting at the station.

On the last day of the House session, Sharon and I were invited by Victoria Steele to be acknowledged, as League and AAUW members and as her supporters, to stand with her on the House floor, as she read her sponsored Proclamation declaring Arizona a Zero Tolerance Zone for Human Trafficking. (Senator Andrea Dalessandro (District 2), and a League member, read, and had passed also, the same Proclamation from the Senate floor.)

It was an honor for League; while it was a cool thing for me to do what I did, I didn't stand alone. League and AAUW represented the countless organizations involved with changing lives for the better – at that time and place – those lives victimized as prostitutes.

I know the HT committee will continue to work hard next session for a better and more comprehensive bill. In the meantime, we'd like to get as many communities and counties in Arizona to also specifically become Zero Tolerance Zones for HT. It raises awareness and puts legislators on the line with a vote. Pima County passed such a Proclamation. I have copies to send out to any League which might attempt further legislation on this front.

I know that HT is not a priority action item for LWVAZ, but next year, when another bill, hopefully gets introduced and sent to only one committee and not 3 or 4 (where it inevitably dies), the HT committee would like some help in working with key legislators to move the bill. Collaboration and connectedness. As I wrote to my committee after all was over:

*“This has been a difficult and convoluted journey and it won't end for years. Hopefully, some understanding will prevail, a more meaningful and stronger piece of legislation will remain a goal for Victoria and many more advocates re: conviction vacating and beyond. I know you all will remain on this journey and continue to work for continued understanding and change. Thank you for all your work and interest. As the old song goes, “We've Only Just Begun.” If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to call me (520-749-3049). We'll stay in touch.”*

I met a lobbyist for the Navajo Nation in the elevator, after being on the floor that day, and, as I was wearing a League button, he said to me -- “I like you guys. You do good work.” And, we do!

article by Joan Kaltsas