

# TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ANTI-TRAFFICKING LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

*Anti-trafficking legislation often focuses primarily on increasing penalties for traffickers and those seeking to purchase sexual services, and/or diverting those arrested for selling sex to programs and services. However, this approach often diverts resources from the investigation and prosecution of other, more common forms of exploitation, ignores the root causes of trafficking, and puts trafficking victims, sex workers, and other marginalized populations at higher risk for violence and criminalization. The suggestions below promote a human-rights based approach to crafting and evaluating legislation and center the elevation of the voices and experiences of those who are impacted by these policies.*

## Ways to Develop Better Anti-Trafficking Policies:

- Prioritize a Victim-Centered Response Without Creating New Victims. Craft and implement anti-trafficking laws and policies that will protect vulnerable groups from harm but also do no further harm. Ensure survivors and other potentially impacted groups are included when drafting and analyzing legislation so as to reduce the likelihood that the laws or policies will have unintended consequences. Prioritize discussion of harm that may occur when legislation focuses solely on criminalization and/or other punitive responses as “treatment.”
- Seek to Address the Root Causes of Trafficking. Look for ways to address the systemic inequities and barriers that increase trafficking vulnerability and exploitation. Consider how restrictions on individual rights, such as through the “War on Drugs,” harsh immigration penalties, or the criminalization of poverty enable the conditions that allow trafficking to flourish. Steer policymakers away from that which centers only on the prosecution and punishment of traffickers, and evaluate proposed legislation with an anti-oppression lens.
- Provide Varied, Meaningful Legal Remedies for Survivors. Help ensure victims of trafficking have the option to seek justice for the harms perpetuated against them in a variety of ways. Promote and support options that do not involve the criminal legal system, including civil legal remedies and restorative justice.

## How to Get Involved in Legislative Advocacy in Maryland:

- Join the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force’s Legislative Subcommittee: Subcommittee members work to determine changes that would improve Maryland’s human trafficking laws, partner with legislators, lobby on behalf of important initiatives, and testify on human trafficking legislation. Every year members sponsor a Lobby Day to End Human Trafficking during the legislative session to raise awareness and mobilize the community. For more information or to sign up, please contact the MD HT Task Force at: <http://www.mdhumantrafficking.org/contact-us>
- Follow Organizations Focused on Ending Violence & Poverty: The [Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence](#), [Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#), and [Women’s Law Center of Maryland](#) all have active social media sites providing regular updates on proposed legislation and provide action alerts, as do organizations like [Job Opportunities Task Force](#), [Out for Justice](#), and [Maryland Justice Project](#), who focus on ending the criminalization of poverty and economic justice for those impacted by the criminal legal system.