



# JERRY PETROWSKI

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

## **Testimony in Support of SB 14/AB 16 – Relating to posting of the national human trafficking hotline**

February 11, 2015

Honorable Chairman and committee members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear SB 14/AB 16 today. This bill is a necessary stepping stone drawing us closer to the eradication of human trafficking. The state of Wisconsin, including the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Representative Loudonbeck, a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers and various non-profit groups have made incredible strides toward the eradication of human trafficking.

Simply put, this bill connects victims with necessary resources. It encourages business owners to post signs containing the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline number. The bill specifically encourages large businesses like grocery stores to post signs, as well as locations where human trafficking victims are likely to present; for example, truck stops, beauty salons, hotels, courthouses and public transit areas.

On the other end of the hotline are trained professionals who can refer information to law enforcement and appropriate local social service resources. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is staffed by trained individuals who determine the best course of action for the caller. The hotline is confidential, anonymous and accessible in 170 different languages. While the hotline itself is a wonderful resource it is crucial that it is able to connect callers to appropriate resources. It is important that we actively encourage local human trafficking service agencies to reach out to the national resource center.

Human Trafficking is not just an urban issue, but one that affects every county in the state of Wisconsin. Many individuals are unaware that this horrific crime occurs right in their communities in Wisconsin. The lack of awareness of human trafficking can mean a lack of service for some of our most vulnerable citizens

Since 2007 there have been 662 calls to the hotline from Wisconsin. 146 calls were made in 2014 alone. Overall, this bill aims to turn victims of human trafficking into survivors. We must do all we can to raise awareness and aid our most vulnerable children and adults. Thank you for your time and I look forward to your support of SB 14 and AB 16.

29<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT



# Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony of Rep. Amy Loudenbeck**  
**Senate Bill 14**  
**Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety**  
**February 11, 2015**

Thank you to the Committee Chair and Representatives for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 14.

Senate Bill 14 requires the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) to create and make available posters with the national human trafficking resource center hotline. The bill also requires the DOJ to encourage establishments such as truck stops, sporting arenas, salons, hotels, and hospitals to display the poster.

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHRTC) Hotline is a 24-hour national hotline operated by the Polaris Project and primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The hotline Call Specialists provide resource referrals, tips to law enforcement, information to the public, and training and technical assistance. Each caller receives a unique case identifier so assistance can be provided in the context of the individual's call history.

Call Specialists undergo extensive training and evaluation prior to answering calls. Each tip is unique and reporting decisions are made on a case-by-case basis to determine the most appropriate next steps that prioritize the safety and consent of individuals involved in the case. If the Call Specialist determines that the caller is referencing a potential case of human trafficking, a Supervisor is immediately alerted to the case to coordinate a response.

My office contacted NHRTC Regional Program Specialist Lara Powers who is responsible for Wisconsin protocols. Ms. Powers informed us that regional protocols are developed for each state so information is customized to the specific needs of every caller. Ms. Powers and other Regional Program Specialists are continually working on making connections with local service providers, law enforcement and stakeholders to maintain updated protocols that reflect priorities and resources of local communities.

Here are some interesting things to note about the hotline:

- Since 2007 there have been 662 contacts from Wisconsin
- 189 contacts were made in 2014 alone, including 43 human trafficking cases reported
- Texting was launched in 2013 and victims reach out for help by text message at twice the rate as by phone call
- The hotline is accessible in 200 languages



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At the state level, twenty-five states require or encourage a hotline number to be posted or promoted within the state. The majority of these states have opted to post the NHTRC hotline number throughout the state. A small number of states (Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Tennessee) have opted to use a state-based hotline.

The locations where a hotline number is posted vary across the states. There are some common venues where human trafficking occurs across the country and many of the hotline posting laws focus on those venues which include places of transit and places where trafficking victims are present.

Some states mandate certain types of businesses to display the poster. Others require posting as a penalty for a nuisance violation related prostitution. This bill takes a distinctly different approach by making display of the poster voluntary, and asking law enforcement and criminal justice to partner with entities across the state to create an information and awareness network. The network doesn't have to be limited to the establishments mentioned in the bill; ideally it would include community organizations, local units of government, and individuals.

The overarching goals of the bill are to raise public awareness, encourage tips, and – most importantly – reach victims and connect them to resources and safety.

I strongly believe that Wisconsinites want to be engaged in the fight against human trafficking, but they don't know how. This bill provides the means and the infrastructure to allow people across Wisconsin to combat human trafficking with confidence. I know our future partners want to be part of a meaningful effort to provide victims and concerned citizens with the right information, at the right time, in the right place. Let's empower them to do it.

Colleagues, thank you for your time today and for allowing me to share information about this important bill. I am happy to answer questions at this time.