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Testimony of Attorney General Martha Coakley on
S. 827/H. 2850, *An Act Relative to the Commercial Exploitation of People*
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State House, Gardner Auditorium

Good afternoon Chairman O’Flaherty, Chairwoman Creem and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today as we seek to address the problem of human trafficking in the Commonwealth. Our office, along with lead sponsors Judiciary Chairman Eugene O’Flaherty and Senator Mark Montigny, as well as our partners in law enforcement, victim advocates, and labor have filed a bill entitled “*An Act Relative to the Commercial Exploitation of People.*” I want to particularly thank Chairman O’Flaherty and Senator Montigny for his leadership and partnership on this important issue.

This bill sends a clear message that this fundamental issue of exploitation of some of our youngest and most vulnerable population is unacceptable in Massachusetts, and gives law enforcement the tools to address it. Let there be no doubt—people of every background are being exploited for sexual servitude and labor across the world, across this country, and right in our own backyard. The growth of the Internet has only made this kind of exploitation more extensive by taking it off the streets and out of our sight.

Today there are still those who say that human trafficking is not a problem in this Commonwealth, or who think that it is simply an issue of consensual sex among adults. We know, however, that human trafficking is the second largest—and the fastest growing—criminal

enterprise in the world. While the nature of the crime and the isolation of its victims makes statistical research difficult, experts estimate that 27 million people are trafficked internationally and domestically, bringing in \$32 billion dollars per year. The average age of entry into the sex trade is children between the ages of 12-14 years old. These children are brought into “the life” at that young age. They are then forced through violence, rape, abuse, threats, and other means, to stay there.

I saw many of these young women first-hand when I served as head of the Child Abuse Unit in Middlesex County in the 1990s. In these cases, we could often get to the young women who were in “the life,” but we were unable to get after those who were exploiting them and trafficking them for profit. Yesterday, I attended a forum held by Representatives Walsh and Malia where we heard from a young victim from Boston who had been brought into “the life” at age 12, and then brutally raped, beaten, and sexually abused by her pimp, who forced her to stay working for him on the streets, selling her body to Johns for years. Of course, the victims of human trafficking are not just young girls, but also include adult women and men being exploited for sex, as well as labor.

As we sit here today, Massachusetts is one of only four states remaining that does not have human trafficking as a crime. We believe it is time to change that. We know the best way to stop human trafficking is by addressing all three fronts of the problem. We need to go after the supply, address the demand that feeds this industry, and support its victims.

In order to address the continued supply of victims, this bill creates the crime of trafficking of persons for sexual servitude, with a penalty of up to 20 years in state prison. In addition, it creates the crime of trafficking of persons for forced labor, with a penalty of up to 15 years in state prison, and imposes minimum mandatory sentences for subsequent offenses, and higher penalties when the victims are children under 18 years.

To stem the demand side, the bill increases penalties for current “John” crimes. Simply put, if no one were buying sex, traffickers and pimps wouldn’t be supplying an endless stream of victims.

Finally, to address the needs of the trafficked, the bill forms a task force to bring all major stakeholders together to collect additional data to further study the problem, recommend information sharing techniques to hold offenders accountable, and suggest further solutions to improve services for victims.

Our office is committed to a comprehensive approach to addressing human trafficking. In addition to the legislation before the Committee, we have created a cross-division strike force to increase prosecutions, educate the general public and private sectors about the problem, help train local law enforcement, and better provide victims with the help they need.

In addition to S. 827 and H. 2850, I also want to express my support for H. 2277, *An Act Relative to Safe Harbor for Exploited Children*, which was filed by Representatives Walsh and Malia and District Attorney Dan Conley. This bill provides additional strategies to recognize exploited children as victims and develop the services necessary to support them. I am happy to stand in support of this legislation today with my friend and colleague, District Attorney Conley.

There is one last point that I would like to make that underscores the need to address this issue now. Currently, we have the crimes of drug trafficking and gun trafficking in our Commonwealth, but we do not have the crime of human trafficking through which some of our most vulnerable young people are being brutally exploited. You know the difference between a drug trafficker and a human trafficker? The drug trafficker sells the drugs, and then has to go get more drugs to sell. The human trafficker sells a young girl, and then sells that same young girl the next day, and the next, and the next. It is a cycle that has to stop, and the way to stop it is to go after the person doing the selling. It is time to end this cycle and send a clear message that this kind of exploitation is unacceptable in Massachusetts in the 21st century.

I urge the committee to vote this bill out favorably. Thank you.

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