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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Trafficking victims shouldn't be convicted of prostitution**

*Senate passes bills to provide legal options to victims of sex trafficking*

SALEM – A pair of bills that will protect sex trafficking victims from legal repercussions related to their own exploitation passed the Oregon Senate today.

The Statewide Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Workgroup – a bipartisan, bicameral group which is co-chaired by Sen. Kathleen Taylor (D-Portland) and Rep. John Huffman (R-The Dalles) – created Senate Bill 249 and Senate Bill 250, which will provide defense mechanisms for trafficking victims who are charged or convicted of prostitution, resulting from their exploitation. These bills will give sex trafficking victims an ability to prevent or remove a charge from their record.

Senate Bill 250 creates an affirmative defense for prostitution, if the defendant can adequately demonstrate they were recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided or obtained for commercial sex acts, and they were a minor, or they can demonstrate that they were forced, tricked or coerced into performing commercial sex acts.

“Victims of sex trafficking are just that: victims,” Taylor said. “It is unjust that a person who has been trafficked receives a charge or conviction of prostitution, when they were engaging in that activity due to the worst kind of exploitation. This allows a fair way for victims of trafficking to avoid prosecution or clear their own names in these cases.”

Senate Bill 249 creates a process to vacate prostitution convictions when the person was a victim of sex trafficking at the time of the incident that led to a conviction. The bill requires the person petitioning the court for a vacation of the conviction to provide an explanation of facts

supporting their victimization, and why the victim was unable to share those facts at trial. Evidence of sex trafficking can include court records, certified immigration records recognizing someone as a sex trafficking victim and sworn statements from professionals certifying that the victim sought assistance related to their exploitation.

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, more than 300 calls in 2016 originated in Oregon.

“I am proud of the continuing progress our work group has made to help address this issue and help support vulnerable Oregonians, including children,” Huffman said. “I am glad to see these bills moving forward with broad, bipartisan support, and I look forward to shepherding them through the House Chamber.”

Senate Bill 249 and Senate Bill 250 now go to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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