

WEST FLORIDA CENTER FOR TRAFFICKING ADVOCACY

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May 28, 2013

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This week, Governor Rick Scott will sign HB 1325 & HB 1327 Relating to Victims of Human Trafficking. The signing will occur on Thursday, May 30, 2013, from 4:00-5:00PM at the Drug Free America Foundation, Inc. in St. Petersburg, FL 5999 Central Avenue, Suite 301.

Legislation sponsored by Rep. Ross Span (R-Dover) and Sen. Anitere Flores (R-Miami), will provide victims of human trafficking the opportunity to petition a court to vacate convictions for offenses committed under the coercion of a trafficker. This legislation found unanimous support in the Florida Legislature.

Numerous stakeholders were involved in this legislative effort, but the primary beneficiaries will be victims of human trafficking who, while trying to restore their lives, find that prior convictions for prostitution, drug abuse, and various other offenses committed under the coercion of their traffickers, slam the doors on employment, academic, housing, volunteer, and other opportunities. The Florida legislature embraced the fundamental principle of justice that no one should be convicted of a crime that he or she was forced to commit.

"Enabling survivors of human trafficking to vacate prior convictions is a great step towards protecting the rights of survivors. We are thrilled that this bill has passed in Florida, building on our victory in passing the first such law in New York in 2010. The passage of this bill will enable survivors to become free of collateral consequences of conviction, including barriers to employment, housing, and immigration status. My clients whose motions have been granted tell me that they feel their experiences were recognized and some of the harm they suffered, by their traffickers and the criminal justice system, was redressed."

Melissa Broudo, Staff Attorney, Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center

"Upon Governor Scott's signing of this bill, we will immediately begin preparing petitions on behalf of victims who desire to vacate past convictions for offenses committed under the coercion of their traffickers. Successful petitions will enable victims to continue the restoration process through previously unavailable opportunities, bringing new hope for the future."

Brent A. Woody, Lead Counsel/Executive Director, West Florida Center for Trafficking Advocacy

While there is much more work to be done, this legislation reflects Florida's emerging recognition of the unique challenges facing survivors of human trafficking.

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