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*Representatives Russell Fry (SC-07), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Ann Wagner (R-MO), and Robert Garcia (D-CA) Introduce the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act*

Washington, D.C. — Today, Representatives Russell Fry (SC-07), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Ann Wagner (R-MO), and Robert Garcia (D-CA) introduced the *Trafficking Survivors Relief Act*. This legislation would provide federal criminal record relief to survivors of human trafficking who committed a non-violent offense as a direct result of having been a victim of trafficking.

Tens of thousands of human trafficking cases are reported every year in the United States. Often, human traffickers force or coerce their victims to engage in criminal activity such as financial crimes, drug offenses, fraud, and identity theft. This can lead to the arrest, conviction, and incarceration of trafficked victims without consideration of their victim status.

At the outset of a prosecution, this legislation would establish an affirmative defense to provide survivors with the opportunity to defend against only those charges that arose directly from their trafficking victimization. It would provide critical relief for survivors who have already been convicted as a result of their trafficking victimization through vacatur, expungement, and sentencing mitigation.

Specifically, for a court to grant a motion to vacate a conviction or expunge an arrest, a defendant must show by a preponderance of the evidence that the offense was committed as a direct result of having been a victim of trafficking. Additionally, the defendant must establish, by clear and convincing evidence, that the defendant was a victim of human trafficking at the time the offense was committed.

*"I am proud to introduce legislation that provides critical relief to victims who unjustly incurred criminal records as a result of having been a victim of trafficking," said **Congressman Russell Fry**. "There are currently almost 30 million victims of human trafficking across the globe, and the grave reality is that it's happening right here in our own communities in the United States. In fact, Horry County is one of the top three counties in South Carolina in reported human trafficking. We must continue to prevent and prosecute these horrific crimes while also supporting survivors."*

*"Human trafficking survivors deserve the opportunity to heal from the trauma of their experiences," said **Congressman Ted Lieu**. "They should not be haunted by a criminal record that they got as a result of being exploited. Survivors can be charged with criminal activity they were forced to engage in. The resulting prosecution and possible conviction can prevent survivors from rebuilding their lives. Our bill would alleviate some of the burden associated with surviving trafficking by providing survivors with an opportunity to defend themselves against prosecution for crimes committed because they were being exploited. Trafficking survivors have endured enough—they should not also be subject to undue prosecution."*

*"I am proud to join Congressman Fry in reintroducing this important legislation that will allow survivors of human trafficking rebuild their lives and break the cycle of exploitation," said **Congresswoman Ann Wagner**. "Far too often, traffickers force their victims to commit crimes against their will, trapping them in the illegal sex trade. This vital, bipartisan bill will ensure that these vulnerable individuals can access the resources they need to begin a new and safer life."*

*"Victims of trafficking endure incredible abuse and trauma. Offenses that are committed as a direct result of such trafficking need to be evaluated with that in mind," said **Congressman Robert Garcia**. "I'm honored to co-lead the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act because it underscores our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable Americans, ensuring victims of trafficking receive the compassion and justice they deserve."*

The *Trafficking Survivors Relief Act* is supported by South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson, along with the following groups: the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, CPAC, Faith & Freedom Coalition, Free to Thrive, Hope for Justice, Hollie Nadel – Survivor Leader, Polaris, Raven, Rights 4 Girls,

Shared Hope International, Street Grace, The Foundation United, The Moore & Van Allen Human Trafficking Pro Bono Project, The National Survivor Law Collective Policy Group, and Thistle Farms.

*"Human trafficking is happening in every corner of South Carolina and the country," said **South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson**. "This heinous crime is usually a gradual one and can affect victims for the rest of their lives. Combatting this issue is near and dear to my heart, and I'm proud of the work Congressman Russell Fry and his colleagues are doing to help survivors through the Trafficking Survivor Relief Act. Passing this bill would be one more useful step in helping eradicate this crime and helping human trafficking victims move forward with their lives."*

*"This bill would create a pathway to allow human trafficking survivors to clear their criminal records of non-violent offenses, said **Dr. Richard Schoeberl, Hope for Justice, U.S. Team Lead**. "This would be a huge step forward. As a former FBI Agent and current advocate for survivors with Hope for Justice, I have worked with many victims of sex trafficking, and I have seen just how often traffickers force their victims to engage in criminal activity. I have supported victims who were arrested because of this. These criminal convictions unfairly restrict their future access to employment, education, housing, and services. We need to vacate and expunge criminal convictions of individuals who have been victims of trafficking and support recovering survivors – not criminalize them. Let's give freedom back to survivors so they can experience a full life after trafficking. We have a responsibility to end these injustices and vacate non-violent criminal convictions of survivors, allowing them to rebuild their lives."*

*"Survivors of trafficking have faced insurmountable mental and physical pain and financial distress during their victimization. We see a myriad of examples where traffickers force victims under duress and coercion to commit crimes," said **Hollie Nadel — Survivor Leader**. "There is a vicious cycle that survivors endure due to criminal records, where obtaining steady employment and qualifying for housing, loans or financial assistance becomes nearly impossible, and even increases the dangers of survivors being re-exploited. Legislation like TSRA is critical to help stop the cycle of further victimization and essential to allowing survivors to rebuild their lives for a safe and successful future."*

*"Human trafficking is a grim reality that not only victimizes the vulnerable but also perpetuates a cycle where survivors may be hit with collateral consequences, expanding the web of exploitation," said **Frank Russo, Director, CPAC Foundation's Center for Combating Human Trafficking**. "Even after surviving abuse, victims of labor and sex trafficking are often left with limited financial resources, damaged reputations, and criminal records. Thankfully, the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act provides a pathway to redemption and rehabilitation for victims who have earned a second chance. We are confident this legislation strikes the right balance between victims' rights and public safety."*

*“Having collaborated with and worked alongside survivors who were wrongfully criminalized, we recognize the insurmountable barriers and vulnerabilities created by criminal records stemming from trafficking victimization,”* **Christine Raino, Senior Director of Public Policy, Shared Hope International.** *“As states gain momentum in passing comprehensive post-conviction relief legislation, Congress must also act to ensure survivors have a pathway to protection from unjust criminalization at the federal level. Believing survivors cannot be supported and protected if they are being criminalized, Shared Hope strongly supports the passage of the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act as a critical step towards true justice.”*

*“I have investigated Human Trafficking and have seen first-hand how Traffickers manipulate and coerce victims,”* **said John Pizzuro, CEO, Raven.** *“As a result, the arrest of a victim and survivor can be catastrophic to their lives, especially after having survived their Traffickers. The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act will protect victims and survivors from prosecution when they have been forced into those crimes by Human Traffickers.”*

*“Besides being exploited for labor and sex, trafficking victims are coerced and forced to engage in criminal activities like drug crimes, financial fraud, and other crimes that further their traffickers’ goals,”* **said Patrick D. Purtill, Director of Legislative Affairs, Faith & Freedom Coalition.** *This results in many trafficking victims being arrested and convicted without the justice system, considering how their own criminal exploitation was the cause. Even after trafficking victims are rescued, these arrests and convictions follow them and make it difficult to get housing and jobs—the two most important things for people to successfully rebuild their lives. The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act would fix this by making it possible for trafficking victims to clear their federal records for crimes committed as a direct result of their trafficking and create an affirmative defense for victims in the criminal justice process. This bill would restore trafficking victims and reintegrate them into their families and communities while making sure law enforcement and the courts can protect public safety.”*

*“The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act provides a critical pathway for survivors trapped in an inequitable cycle perpetuated by a criminal history after years of exploitation, abuse, and coercion,”* **said Tasha Kennard, CEO of Thistle Farms in Nashville, Tennessee.** *“We see the power of record expungement every day and how it breaks down the systemic barriers survivors encounter when attempting to access safe and affordable housing and employment. The TSRA will open more doors for survivors to overcome obstacles and rebuild their lives while healing from the trauma of trafficking.”*

*“AAHOA has long been at the forefront of human trafficking education and prevention, recognizing that hoteliers are in a prime position to lead the fight against human trafficking,”* **said AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake.** *“Any legislation that further*

*protects, prioritizes, and supports the victims of human trafficking is encouraged and applauded; we're grateful to Congressman Fry, Congressman Garcia, Congressman Lieu, and Congresswoman Wagner for introducing the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act, which puts the victims of human trafficking first."*

Congressman Fry serves on both the House Judiciary Committee and the House Oversight Committee and is also the Republican freshman class president. To stay up to date with Congressman Fry and his work for the Seventh District, follow his official [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#) pages and visit his website at [fry.house.gov](http://fry.house.gov).

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