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Executive Director

Betsy Butler

March 22, 2016

The Honorable Shirley Weber
Assemblymember, District 79
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Assembly Bill 1761 (Weber) – Support

Dear Assemblymember Weber:

On behalf of the California Women's Law Center (CWLC), I am writing in support of AB 1761, which would create an affirmative defense for human trafficking victims who are prosecuted for certain non-violent crimes.

Thirty-four states have enacted laws making a person's status as a victim of human trafficking an affirmative defense to certain criminal charges. Currently, California has no such law. AB 1761 would change this, acknowledging the special circumstances that are at play for human trafficking victims who commit certain non-violent crimes.

Trafficking victims are often perceived as uncooperative when they encounter law enforcement because they do not feel safe revealing information about their traffickers or their circumstances. As a result, victims are arrested for crimes they committed under coercion. Too many people face jail time or imprisonment as a result of the actions of those who exploit them. They continue to suffer even after their release because the stigma of a criminal conviction follows trafficking victims and hinders their opportunities throughout their lives.

CWLC is dedicated to eliminating the barriers that keep women and girls in poverty. Since its founding in 1989, CWLC has worked to advance the potential of women and girls through transformative litigation, policy advocacy, and education. An important part of our mission is to ensure that victims of crime, especially those crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls, are not re-victimized by the systems and laws that are supposed to protect them.

The California Women's Law Center strongly supports AB 1761, which will give human trafficking victims a voice in court that would shield them from the additional harm of an unjust criminal conviction.

Sincerely,



Betsy Butler
Executive Director