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## Sullivan to introduce anti-human trafficking bill

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By Cherise Madigan, Manchester Journal

MANCHESTER — Human trafficking is a pervasive problem across the globe, and Vermont is not immune according to local Representative Linda Joy Sullivan.

Beyond her role in the Vermont Legislature — representing the towns of Dorset, Danby, Mt. Tabor, Landgrove, and Peru — Sullivan is also the co-founder and former executive director of the organization Building Empowerment By Stopping Trafficking (B.E.S.T), which has assisted over 3,000 victims of human trafficking in 24 states and eight countries to date.

This January, Sullivan hopes to strengthen protections for Vermont's victims of human trafficking through a new bill, formulated in conjunction with Representative Susan Buckholz of Hartford.

"The bill proposal is driven by the fact that the human trafficking industry is one of the highest organized crimes in the U.S.," Sullivan said. "Human slavery drives underground cash, [as well as] byproduct illegal business activities."

In the past, Sullivan has put her legal background to work by training judges and law enforcement in Vermont on human trafficking issues. The legislator has also worked directly with victims to provide pro-bono attorneys and certified life coaches, both of which provide assistance in navigating the legal

system.

That background provided vital insight in crafting the bill, Sullivan says, though she was not alone in her ability to draw from professional experience.

"My co-sponsor on the proposed bill, Representative Buckholz of Hartford, has many years of representation of clients and victims in family court," she said. "[We] reviewed the Vermont statutes and weighed the needs of the victims of human trafficking to bring this bill proposal."

The coming legislation has a strictly legal focus according to Sullivan, which allows the emphasis to remain on helping victims navigate the legal system rather than prosecuting perpetrators — though its provisions may allow more cases to be brought to court.

The major provisions of the bill include: allowing for the annulment of civil marriages carried out by force or fraud; allowing courts to terminate the parental rights of offenders provided that there is clear and convincing evidence of sexual assault; and denying all parent-child contact for individuals convicted of human trafficking, or in cases where there is clear and convincing evidence that human trafficking occurred.

"The focus of the bill does not eliminate perpetrators; in fact it will flesh out the perpetrators, as they will have the opportunity through the legal process to step up and claim their parental status," she explained. "Naturally, if it is proven that they have participated in human trafficking, there will be the ability to bring causes of action."

In crafting the legislation Sullivan says that she and Buckholz focused on reviewing the existing laws for victims of human trafficking alongside those for victims of other crimes, and worked to align the two.

When Sullivan and Buckholz submit their bill in January, they hope that the legislation will move through the House and Senate quickly according to Sullivan. Still, she concedes, it is ultimately the committee in which the bill lands that will determine its priority. In this case, she asserts that it should be the Judiciary Committee.

"We hope that there will be no opposition, but you never know," Sullivan said. "My co-sponsor Representative Susan Buckholz and myself will aggressively attempt to work to get this proposed bill passed, as we believe it is a necessary step in the fight against human trafficking."

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