

Written Testimony to the Texas House Business and Industry Committee
by Minal Patel Davis for House Bill 390

March 9, 2021

Minal Patel Davis, I support the bill, City of Houston

The City of Houston appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 390. Employing more than 22,000 people with an annual budget of \$5.6 billion, the City of Houston has many varied interests before the Texas Legislature, including human trafficking.

As the Director of the Mayor's Office of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence, I have overseen anti-trafficking policies and initiatives over the last 6 years. One such example is the Hotel Ordinance advanced by Mayor Turner that was passed unanimously in April 2020, which serves as the foundation for HB 390.

SCOPE

As per reports from Polaris, the national anti-trafficking organization, both sex and labor trafficking are prevalent in hotels across Texas. Traffickers have quickly made these businesses a part of their illicit business models as they work day and night to exploit the most vulnerable, mostly women and children, in our state's cities and rural areas – all as hotel and motel owners stand to profit.

One of the prevalent forms of sex trafficking in hotels is via escort services either through out calls or in calls be it high end or low-end hotels. Victims are sometimes "housed" in hotels and are often subjected to violence within hotel rooms. There are even instances where traffickers/pimps have used hotels as their base operations.

Hotels and motels have also been used to exploit Texas youth for labor via travelling sales crews, a form of labor trafficking that exploits vulnerable youth such as homeless youth, to sell wares never seeing pay or profit, staying at motels along their routes.

Labor trafficking also occurs within the hotel and hospitality industry itself. Potential victims of labor trafficking can work as front-of-house staff, food service workers, and most frequently, in housekeeping.

Furthermore, in Houston, with just under 560 hotels, Police conducted 269 operations at 116 locations over 4 years. This demonstrates a need for additional regulation that empowers employees to be trained *with consistency* on both sex and labor trafficking to fill the gaps in law enforcement capacity to combat this heinous crime.

WHAT BILL DOES

HB 390 requires:

- Hotel operators must provide training to each employee

- There is free training available that the AG's office can approve in multiple languages if they choose to go that route
- Requires training records are kept that they would have to produce in 72 hours
- Requires hoteliers to display signs in English and Spanish with indicators and a hotline number employees can report
- And ensures that employees that do report are not retaliated against

Thank you for your time.