



COALITION TO
ABOLISH SLAVERY
& TRAFFICKING

February 15, 2017

Honorable Steve Cohen
2404 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Kinzinger
2245 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tony Cardenas
1510 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ann Wagner
435 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support H.R.767 & S. 256, the Stop, Observe, Ask and Respond (SOAR) to Health and Wellness Act.

Dear Representatives Cohen, Kinzinger, Cardenas, and Wagner:

The Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) writes in strong support of **H.R. 5405 & S. 1446**, the **Stop, Observe, Ask and Respond (SOAR) to Health and Wellness Act**. Founded in 1998 in Los Angeles, California, CAST was one of the first organizations in the United States to provide comprehensive social and legal services for survivors of human trafficking. Additionally, CAST opened the first shelter in the country exclusively dedicated to providing physically and psychologically safe housing for survivors. CAST serves male, female, and child victims of trafficking. To date, CAST has provided services to over 1,500 survivors and their family members, as well as thousands of hours of technical consultation to organizations working on this issue across the country and internationally. Our experience providing legal and social services to survivors gives us critical information about the real-life experiences of trafficking victims.

Therefore, we know firsthand that survivors of human trafficking suffer from a wide range of physical and psychological health concerns stemming from inhumane living conditions, inadequate access to food, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Given the severity of the abuse and neglect trafficking survivors suffer, over often long periods of time, we have heard from countless survivors that they have received medical care and attention at Emergency Departments or other medical facilities and not been identified and assisted as a

survivor of modern-slavery.

The SOAR Act presents a unique opportunity to identify and assist survivors of this crime in a safe environment, designed to protect their well-being and health. Health care professionals are critically positioned to help identify and refer trafficking survivor patients for assistance.

The Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) "Stop, Observe, Ask and Respond" (SOAR) to Health and Wellness Training has been implemented on a pilot basis as part of a Federal Strategic Action Plan to address human trafficking. The objective of the SOAR Training is to equip providers in health care settings to identify potential human trafficking victims and provide appropriate care. The SOAR Act would authorize funding to ensure the pilot work already underway at HHS continues to maximize the number of trained providers.

It also ensures the training is survivor centered and that survivors can receive appropriate referrals for services and report to law enforcement the crimes committed against them. Finally, it provides that data on the effectiveness of the training be collected.

Given the survivor-centered nature of this bill, we thank you on behalf of the survivors we serve for being an advocate for such an important policy.

Sincerely,



Kay Buck, CEO