

# The Connecticut General Assembly



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## State Reps. Morin, Cook Applaud House Passage of Anti-Human Trafficking Bill

*Legislation to increase sex trafficking penalties*



*Reps. Morin and Cook speak on the House floor after voting in favor of the bill*

**State Reps. Russ Morin** (D-Wethersfield) and **Michelle Cook** (D-Torrington) applauded the House passage today of a bill they co-introduced to combat human trafficking in Connecticut. Rep. Morin presided over the House discussion and passage.

HB 7309, An Act Concerning Human Trafficking, aims to prevent sex trafficking by adding members to the state's Trafficking in Persons Council, increasing penalties for sex trafficking, and providing greater education to state agencies.

“We don’t want to admit that it’s happening here, but it is happening. It is our job as legislators to ensure that we are providing the necessary resources to assist victims of human trafficking and prosecute the perpetrators,” **Rep. Cook** said. “This bill takes an important step by recognizing that a minor cannot consent to selling sexual services – patronizing a minor is sexual abuse, full stop. I hope today’s vote sends a message to victims that they are never at fault for the abuse they’ve suffered.”

“It can be a difficult topic to discuss, but we must recognize that sex trafficking happens in Connecticut. The courageous testimony of survivors of sex trafficking is what really drove home the urgency of this issue,” **Rep. Morin** said. “This bill brings our criminal penalties more in line with federal statutes so that we as a state can hold perpetrators accountable. The victims of this terrible abuse deserve our full support and part of that is ensuring our laws reflect the serious nature of these crimes.”

At the bill’s public hearing in front of the Judiciary Committee in March, **Rep. Morin** testified in favor of the bill along with a former Wethersfield resident who was the victim of sex trafficking.

The bill would:

- Expand the membership of the state’s Trafficking in Persons Council, including adding an individual who has been a victim of sex trafficking.
- Increase the penalty for trafficking in persons from a class B to a class A felony, in line with federal statute, and broaden the definition of “sex trafficking”.
- Create a new crime, “commercial sex abuse of a minor,” which would be a class B felony, and a Class A felony if the minor is under 15 years of age. Patronizing a minor is currently a class C felony.
- Require an increased number of businesses to post signage with the Trafficking in Persons Council hotline number.
- Provide and require training for state public safety, legal, and health care employees, and public school employees for identifying and reporting human trafficking.

The bill passed the House unanimously, on a 146 – 0 vote.

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