

House OKs anti-trafficking bill to 'protect the most vulnerable among us'

WASHINGTON (CNS) – “Critical” anti-trafficking legislation overwhelmingly approved by the House in a bipartisan vote on July 26 “will go a long way toward protecting so many vulnerable people from exploitation while providing tremendous support and resources to victims,” said one of its sponsors, Rep. Chris Smith, N.J.

Smith and Rep. Karen Bass, D-Calif., wrote the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022, which House members passed in a 401-20 vote.

The House vote came four days ahead of the U.N. World Day Against Trafficking in Persons on July 30. The measure now goes to the Senate, where it is expected to pass in a bipartisan vote.

“The enormous support in the House for this critical human rights and law enforcement legislation is a testament to a widespread consensus and underscores the absolute urgency for securing the funds needed to protect victims, prosecute perpetrators and prevent trafficking from occurring in the first place,” Smith said.

Bass told her fellow House members that during her career as a health care worker and a legislator that she has seen “too many instances of human rights violations against children and other vulnerable populations – including those falling victim to the abuses of human trafficking, both in the U.S. and around the world.”

“We must take this issue seriously and continue to implement a

whole-of-government approach to addressing it," she said. "The Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022 moves to do this not only in supporting those who have already fallen victim, but to also prevent future trafficking and bring perpetrators to justice."

Ahead of the vote, she said: "We must swiftly pass this bipartisan measure to protect the most vulnerable among us."

Smith, who also spoke ahead of the vote, said: "Human traffickers never take a holiday, nor can we."

"Because traffickers and the nefarious networks they lead always find new ways to exploit the vulnerable, especially women and children," he added, "we must aggressively strengthen laws and their implementation."

Among other things, the Smith-Bass legislation will:

- Provide more than \$1.1 billion over five years to reauthorize and enhance successful programs established by Smith's Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 such as shelters, mental health care, education, life skills and job training.
- Reauthorize Homeland Security's Angel Watch Center codified by Smith's International Megan's Law of 2016 to prevent international sex tourism travel by convicted child sex offenders.
- Enhance trafficking prevention education for children by involving parents and law enforcement in age-appropriate programs to assist in the prevention of child trafficking as well as online grooming.
- Provide \$35 million for housing opportunities to help women escape living with their abusers and to help prevent trafficking of graduated foster youth.

“Human traffickers never take a holiday, nor can we,” Smith, who has chaired more than 35 hearings and written five anti-trafficking laws, told House members. “Because traffickers and the nefarious networks they lead always find new ways to exploit the vulnerable, especially women and children, we must aggressively strengthen laws and their implementation.”