

HB 2273 -- ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS

SPONSOR: Lewis

This bill establishes the "Committee on Sex and Human Trafficking Training", which will be composed of seven members, including, but not limited to, a representative of the Attorney General's Office, a representative of the Department of Public Safety, and a juvenile officer. The committee must annually evaluate and establish guidelines for required sex and human trafficking training. The committee will dissolve on December 31, 2031.

This bill replaces the term "child pornography" with "child sexual abuse material" throughout statute, but child pornography as it will have existed prior to the effective date of this legislation will still be subject to the provisions of the relevant statutes.

The Department of Health and Senior Services will require each EMT, including each paramedic, to receive certain hours of sex and human trafficking training as part of continuing education requirements for relicensure every five years. Each county prosecuting attorney and juvenile officer must complete one hour of sex and human trafficking training annually, social workers will be required to complete two hours of sex and human trafficking training for license renewal, and each peace officer will be required to receive two hours of sex and human trafficking training within the law enforcement continuing education one-year reporting period.

The bill also establishes the "Statewide Council Against Adult Trafficking and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children" to replace the "Statewide Council on Sex Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children", which expired on December 31, 2023. The new council must be created within 30 days of August 28, 2026, is required to meet at least quarterly, and is within the Office of the Attorney General. The members of the council are specified and include two members of the Senate and two members of the House of Representatives. The Council is also required to have an executive director, who must be appointed by the Attorney General and whose compensation will be set by the Attorney General.

The bill creates the "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Education and Awareness Fund", of which the State Treasurer will be the custodian and of which the Treasurer is required to approve disbursements as required by the Attorney General. Money in the Fund will be used to pay for the position of the executive director and administrative support for the statewide council,

against adult trafficking and the commercial exploitation of children, education and awareness regarding human trafficking, and anti-trafficking efforts throughout the State.

The bill authorizes a person to file a cause of action to recover damages from injury or illness caused by child sex trafficking within 20 years of the plaintiff turning 21 years old or within three years of the date the plaintiff discovers or reasonably should have discovered that the injury or illness was caused by child sex trafficking. This provision applies to any action commenced on or after August 28, 2026.

This bill allows a prosecuting or circuit attorney to request assistance from the Attorney General to assist in the prosecution of child sex trafficking cases.

The bill specifies that the term of imprisonment for the offense of sexual trafficking of a child in the second degree when it is committed by a parent, legal guardian, or other person having custody or control of a child is "life imprisonment", which, in this instance, means for the duration of the person's natural life.

Any real or personal property that was used, attempted to be used, or intended to be used to commit a certain unlawful sexual offense can be seized and will be forfeited as provided by current law.

Currently, the offense of patronizing prostitution is a class B felony if the individual the person patronizes is 15 years of age or younger, and a class B misdemeanor unless the individual the person patronizes is under 18 years old but older than age 15. This bill increases the penalty to a class E felony, unless the individual the person patronizes is less than 18 years old but older than age 15, at which point it becomes a class D felony.

The term "child sexual abuse material" now includes any anatomically correct doll, mannequin, or robot meant to resemble a minor under 18 years of age and intended to be used for the purpose of arousing or gratifying the sexual desire of any person or for the purpose of terrorizing or causing emotional distress to any person.

Currently, a person who was convicted of the offense of prostitution who was under the age of 18 at the time of the offense can apply to the appropriate court to have his or her record expunged. This bill repeals the requirement that the person be under the age of 18 at the time of the offense.

Current law authorizes a panel within the Department of Public Safety to award grants to multijurisdictional internet cyber crime law enforcement task forces, enforcement groups, and other law enforcement agencies. The program expired on August 28, 2024, and terminated on September 1, 2025. This bill repeals that expiration.

This bill is similar to HB 1946 (2026) and CCS HCS SS SCS SB 60 (2025).