

# **WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE**

## **2026 REGULAR SESSION**

**Introduced**

### **Senate Bill 679**

By Senator Azinger

[Introduced January 30, 2026; referred  
to the Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §61-8-5, §61-14-1, §61-14-6, §61-14-8, and §61-14-9 of the Code of  
2 West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to increasing protection for minor victims of the  
3 crime of human trafficking; and modifying terms.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:*

**ARTICLE 8. CRIMES AGAINST CHASTITY, MORALITY AND DECENCY.**

**§61-8-5. Houses of ill fame and assignation; immunity for minor victims of sex trafficking;  
penalties; jurisdiction of courts.**

1 (a) Any person who shall keep, set up, maintain, or operate any house, place, building,  
2 hotel, tourist camp, other structure, or part thereof, or vehicle, trailer, or other conveyance for the  
3 purpose of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation; or who shall own any place, house, hotel, tourist  
4 camp, other structure, or part thereof, or trailer or other conveyance knowing the same to be used  
5 for the purpose of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation, or who shall let, sublet, or rent any such  
6 place, premises, or conveyance to another with knowledge or good reason to know of the intention  
7 of the lessee or rentee to use such place, premises, or conveyance for prostitution, lewdness, or  
8 assignation; or who shall offer, or offer to secure, another for the purpose of prostitution, or for any  
9 other lewd or indecent act; or who shall receive or offer or agree to receive any person into any  
10 house, place, building, hotel, tourist camp, or other structure, or vehicle, trailer, or other  
11 conveyance for the purpose of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation, or to permit any person to  
12 remain there for such purpose; or who for another or others shall direct, take, or transport, or offer  
13 or agree to take or transport, or aid or assist in transporting, any person to any house, place,  
14 building, hotel, tourist camp, other structure, vehicle, trailer, or other conveyance, or to any other  
15 person with knowledge or having reasonable cause to believe that the purpose of such directing,  
16 taking, or transporting is prostitution, lewdness, or assignation; or who shall aid, abet, or  
17 participate in the doing of any acts herein prohibited, shall, upon conviction for the first offense  
18 under this section, be punished by imprisonment in the county jail for a period not less than six  
19 months nor more than one year, and by a fine of not less than \$100 and not to exceed \$250, and

upon conviction for any subsequent offense under this section shall be punished by imprisonment in the penitentiary for a period of not less than one year nor more than five years.

(b) Any person who shall engage in prostitution, lewdness, or assignation, or who shall solicit, induce, entice, or procure another to commit an act of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation; or who shall reside in, enter, or remain in any house, place, building, hotel, tourist camp, or other structure, or enter or remain in any vehicle, trailer, or other conveyance for the purpose of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation; or who shall aid, abet, or participate in the doing of any of the acts herein prohibited, shall, upon conviction for the first offense under this section, be punished by imprisonment in the county jail for a period of not less than 60 days nor more than six months, and by a fine of not less than \$50 and not to exceed \$100; and upon conviction for the second offense under this section, be punished by imprisonment in the county jail for a period of not less than six months nor more than one year, and by a fine of not less than \$100 and not to exceed \$250, and upon conviction for any subsequent offense under this section shall be punished by confinement in a state correctional facility for not less than one year nor more than three years. ~~Provided, That no minor shall be prosecuted nor held criminally liable for an offense of prostitution in violation this subsection. if the court determines that the minor is a victim of an offense under §61-14-1 et seq. of this code~~

The subsequent offense provision shall apply only to the pimp, panderer, solicitor, operator, or any person benefiting financially or otherwise from the earnings of a prostitute.

(c) All leases and agreements, oral or written, for letting, subletting, or renting any house, place, building, hotel, tourist camp, or other structure which is used for the purpose of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation, shall be void from and after the date of any person who is a party to such an agreement shall be convicted of an offense hereunder. The term "tourist camp" shall include any temporary or permanent buildings, tents, cabins, or structures, or trailers, or other vehicles which are maintained, offered, or used for dwelling or sleeping quarters for pay.

(d) In the trial of any person, charged with a violation of any of the provisions of this section,

testimony concerning the reputation or character of any house, place, building, hotel, tourist camp, or other structure, and of the person or persons who reside in or frequent same, and of the defendant or defendants, shall be admissible in evidence in support of the charge. Justices of the peace shall have concurrent jurisdiction with circuit, intermediate, and criminal courts to try and determine the misdemeanors set forth and described in this section.

## **ARTICLE 14. HUMAN TRAFFICKING.**

### **§61-14-1. Definitions.**

When used in this article, the following words and terms shall have the meaning specified unless the context clearly indicates a different meaning:

(1) "Adult" means an individual 18 years of age or older.

(2) "Coercion" means:

(A) The use or threat of force against, abduction of, serious harm to or physical restraint of an individual;

(B) The use of a plan, pattern, or statement with intent to cause an individual to believe that failure to perform an act will result in the use of force against, abduction of, serious harm to, physical restraint of or deportation of an individual;

(C) The abuse or threatened abuse of law or legal process;

(D) The destruction or taking of, or the threatened destruction or taking of, an individual's identification document or other property; or

(E) The use of an individual's physical or mental impairment when the impairment has a substantial adverse effect on the individual's cognitive or volitional function.

As used in this article, "coercion" does not include statements or actions made by a duly authorized state or federal law-enforcement officer as part of a lawful law enforcement investigation or undercover action.

(3) "Commercial sexual activity" means sexual activity for which anything of value is given to, promised to, or received by a person.

(4) "Debt bondage" means inducing an individual to provide:

(A) Commercial sexual activity in payment toward or satisfaction of a real or purported debt; or

(B) Labor or services in payment toward or satisfaction of a real or purported debt if:

(i) The reasonable value of the labor or services is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt; or

(ii) The length of the labor or services is not limited, and the nature of the labor or services is not defined.

(5) "Forced labor" means labor or services that are performed or provided by another person and are obtained or maintained through the following:

(A) Threat, either implicit or explicit, deception or fraud, scheme, plan, or pattern or other action intended to cause a person to believe that, if the person did not perform or provide the labor or services, that person or another person would suffer serious bodily harm, physical restraint, or deportation;

(B) Physically restraining or threatening to physically restrain a person;

(C) Abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process; or

(D) Destroying, concealing, removing, confiscating, or possessing any actual or purported passport or other immigration document, or any other actual or purported government identification document of another person: *Provided*, That "forced labor" does not mean labor or services required to be performed by a person in compliance with a court order or as a required condition of probation, parole, or imprisonment.

As applied in this article, forced labor shall not include labor, work or services provided by a minor to the minor's parent, legal custodian or legal guardian, so long as the legal guardianship or custody of the minor was not obtained for the purpose of compelling the minor to participate in commercial sex acts or sexually explicit performance, or perform forced labor or services; nor shall it include physical restraint of a minor, or the threat of physical restraint to a minor, by his or her

46 parents, legal custodian or legal guardian if conducted in an otherwise lawful manner and for the  
47 purpose of discipline, supervision or teaching.

48 (6) "Human trafficking", "trafficking", or "traffics" means knowingly recruiting, transporting,  
49 transferring, harboring, receiving, providing, obtaining, isolating, maintaining, or enticing an  
50 individual to engage in debt bondage, forced labor, ~~or~~ sexual servitude, or the commercial sexual  
51 activity of a minor.

52 (7) "Identification document" means a passport, driver's license, immigration document,  
53 travel document or other government-issued identification document, including a document issued  
54 by a foreign government.

55 (8) "Labor or services" means activity having economic value.

56 (9) "Minor" means a person younger than 18 years of age or a person representing himself  
57 or herself to be a minor. Any prosecution, pursuant to this article, relating to a person that is  
58 representing himself or herself to be a minor shall be limited to investigations being conducted or  
59 overseen by law enforcement officers.

60 (10) "Patronize" means giving, agreeing to give, or offering to give anything of value to  
61 another person in exchange for commercial sexual activity.

62 (11) "Person" means an individual, estate, business or nonprofit entity, or other legal entity.  
63 The term does not include a public corporation or government or governmental subdivision,  
64 agency, or instrumentality.

65 (12) "Serious harm" means harm, whether physical or nonphysical, including  
66 psychological, economic, or reputational, to an individual which would compel a reasonable  
67 individual of the same background and in the same circumstances to perform or continue to  
68 perform labor or services or sexual activity to avoid incurring the harm.

69 (13) "Sexual activity" means sexual contact, sexual intercourse, or sexual intrusion, as  
70 defined in §61-8b-1 of this code, or sexually explicit conduct, as defined in §61-8-1 of this code.

71 (14) "Sexual servitude" means:

(A) Maintaining, ~~or making available,~~ or patronizing a minor for the purpose of engaging the minor in commercial sexual activity; or

(B) Using coercion to compel an adult to engage in commercial sexual activity.

(15) "Victim" means an individual who is subjected to human trafficking, regardless of whether a perpetrator is prosecuted or convicted.

**§61-14-6. Patronizing a victim of sexual servitude; penalties.**

(a) Any person who knowingly patronizes another in commercial sexual activity and who knows that such person patronized is a victim of sexual servitude, is guilty of a felony and, upon conviction thereof, shall be imprisoned in a state correctional facility for not less than one nor more than five years, fined not more than \$100,000, or both imprisoned and fined.

(b) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a) of this section, any person who knowingly patronizes a minor to engage in commercial sexual activity ~~and who knows or has reason to know that said minor is a victim of sexual servitude~~ is guilty of a felony and, upon conviction thereof, shall be imprisoned in a state correctional facility for not less than three nor more than 15 years, fined not more than \$300,000, or both imprisoned and fined.

**§61-14-8. Immunity for minor victim of sex trafficking.**

(a) In a prosecution or a juvenile prosecution for an offense of prostitution in violation of §61-8-5(b) of this code, a minor shall not be held criminally liable if the court determines that the minor is a victim of an offense under this article. ~~Provided, That subject to proof, a minor so charged shall be rebuttably presumed to be a victim under the provisions of this article~~

(b) This section does not apply in a prosecution or a juvenile proceeding for any of the other offenses under §61-8-5(b) of this code, including specifically soliciting, inducing, enticing, or procuring another to commit an act or offense of prostitution, unless it is determined by the court that the minor was coerced into the criminal behavior.

(c) A minor who, under subsection (a) or (b) of this section, is not subject to criminal liability or adjudication as a juvenile delinquent is presumed to be an abused child, as defined in §49-1-

201 of this code, and may be eligible for services under chapter 49 of this code including, but not limited to, appropriate child welfare services including, but not limited to, comprehensive trauma-informed services that are specialized to the needs of child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation or child sex trafficking victims.

**§61-14-9. Petition to vacate and expunge conviction or juvenile delinquency adjudication of sex trafficking victim.**

(a) Notwithstanding the age and criminal history limitations set forth in §61-11-26 of this code or the provisions in §49-4-103 of this code, an individual convicted of prostitution in violation of §61-8-5(b) of this code, ~~as a direct result of being a victim of trafficking~~ may apply by petition to the circuit court in the county of conviction or juvenile adjudication to vacate the conviction or adjudication of juvenile delinquency and expunge the record of conviction or record of adjudication of juvenile delinquency by a showing that the underlying offense was as a direct result of sex trafficking. The court may grant the petition upon a finding that the individual's participation in the offense was a direct result of being a victim of trafficking.

(b) A victim of trafficking seeking relief under this section is not required to complete any type of rehabilitation in order to obtain expungement.

(c) A petition filed under subsection (a) of this section, any hearing conducted on the petition, and any relief granted are subject to the procedural requirements of §61-11-26 of this code: *Provided*, That the age or criminal history limitations in that section and the provisions of §49-4-103 of this code are inapplicable to victims of human trafficking.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to provide additional protection for the minor victims of sex trafficking.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.