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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Smith Advances Legislation to Help Victims of Human Trafficking**

SACRAMENTO – Assemblywoman Smith (D-Santa Clarita) and joint-author Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez (D-San Diego) moved forward AB 629 to help human trafficking victims rebuild their lives. The bill is cosponsored by the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) and Bet Tzedek Legal Services.

Assembly Bill 629 would make human trafficking victims eligible to receive compensation from the California Victim Compensation Board for income lost while being forced into labor or services comparable to modern-day slavery.

“We must demonstrate our commitment to victim’s recovery by ensuring fair and equal access to compensation for loss of income,” said **Assemblywoman Smith**. “Human trafficking victims bear the scars of their trauma for a lifetime. These resources are an important tool in supporting a better future for them.”

Last year, AB 900 (Gonzalez, 2018) the predecessor legislation to AB 629, passed with unanimous support of both the Assembly and Senate. Unfortunately, it was vetoed by the Governor because of the stated “over-committed funding source” of the crime victim’s fund. Both the federal and state crime victim funds are currently operating with a surplus.

“The nightmare these victims face does not end when they are rescued,” **Assemblywoman Gonzalez** said. “This measure will make sure the thousands of Californians who were enslaved by human traffickers can get the resources and support they need to become strong, independent members of our community.”

The Victim Compensation Program was created by the state of California in 1965 as the payor of last resort to help crime victims recover and stabilize financially in the aftermath of the violent crimes committed against them by allowing them to seek payment for medical treatment, security needs, relocation expenses and mental health services. Some victims are also eligible for compensation of lost wages if the wages were lost as a result of the crime they experienced. With

regards to AB 629, that would include wages for the work or services they performed while under control of human traffickers.

Most victims of human trafficking, however, are unable to receive compensation for lost income as a result of being trafficked because they do not have proper documentation of their previous employment. Human trafficking victims differ from other victims in that their forced labor is the commission of the crime against them, so official documentation of employment or promised wages does not exist—no trafficker provides a paystub to their victim.

**Kay Buck, CAST CEO** notes that “As one of the largest legal and social service providers in California, CAST sees every day how our government systems fail to identify human trafficking survivors and treat them as victims. AB 629 sends a clear message to survivors that our systems are willing to change to better protect them.”

The bill would cap a victim’s total compensation for lost income at \$10,000 per year for a maximum of two years, and the calculation would be based on the minimum wage. The total benefit a human trafficking victim could receive would remain equal to the amount other victims may claim.

AB 629 passed out of the Assembly Public Safety Committee with a unanimous vote and bipartisan support. The next step for the bill will be Assembly Appropriations Committee.

*Assemblywoman Christy Smith represents California’s 38th Assembly District, which includes the communities of Santa Clarita, Simi Valley, Agua Dulce, Castaic, Santa Susana Knolls and North San Fernando Valley.*

*Systemic change is at the core of CAST’s mission. Taking a survivor-centered approach to ending modern slavery, CAST has a proven track record of working directly with survivors of human trafficking which builds an important bridge between practice and policy to inform effective policy initiatives. By developing broad-based partnerships, CAST effectively advocates for policies that work to end human trafficking and help survivors rebuild their lives.*

***Bet Tzedek** is committed to providing free legal services to those that need them most. Bet Tzedek attorneys and advocates help people of all communities and generations secure life’s necessities. Wherever people are in crisis, Bet Tzedek’s core services and rapid response programs provide stability and hope. Founded in 1974, Bet Tzedek – Los Angeles’ House of Justice – helps over 40,000 people each year.*

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