



First, I want to thank this council committee for the space to share about what I believe to be one of the most serious and challenging issues our city faces, human trafficking, and more specifically sex trafficking.

My name is Natasha Guynes, and I'm the Founder and President of HER Resiliency Center. A survivor led nonprofit. At HER, we support young women overcoming various forms of hardships and barriers to achieving a thriving future. I would like to begin this testimony with a brief story that I believe highlights the many key issues and needs as Baltimore grapples with sex trafficking.

Early last year, we received an after-hours call from a woman named Tina.

Tina was calling from BPD's downtown station requesting an advocate. I personally drove to the station. When I arrived and asked the BPD detective for a little more information, she said "apparently she's been human trafficked." I asked if BPD's sex trafficking unit had been contacted but only received a shrug. Within minutes of talking to Tina, I learned that she had been gang trafficked – sold for sex – for eight years. Brutally beaten, deprived food and water, and locked in rooms for days at a time while man after man raped her. She managed to escape but had just been identified by an associate of her sex trafficker, taken out of the city, raped, and left to find her way back. I could see the detective's skepticism of Tina's accounts, including that of being sex trafficked. Tina presented as obese and disheveled. And given the triggering nature of the situation, had a hard time accounting for every detail in chronological order. In addition to the lack of support from law enforcement, Tina's significant medical and psychological needs made it difficult for her to get services that would even provide shelter, much less the much-needed attention as a human being, and trauma recovery support to heal from years of torment and trauma.

We were able to get Tina relocated out of state to an intensive trauma recovery program – but only after several members of my team spent around the clock time with her – for more than six weeks.



Tina's story highlights two critical truths about the current situation in Baltimore City:

1. At the precinct and street level, BPD is currently unprepared to appropriately speak to victims of sex trafficking as necessary for stopping the trafficking rings in our city, and is unable to differentiate between sex trafficking and sex work.
2. Sex trafficking victims experience complex trauma which requires significant specialized resources for short and long-term stabilization. This along with the current lack of coordination between agencies means that even more resources are required of each entity to coordinate.

The good news is that we can begin to address these issues quickly with focused effort in two areas:

1. Broad education throughout BPD – at every level – on how to differentiate between sex trafficking victims and sex workers, and how to interact with a trauma focused mindset for the safety and stabilization of the individual.
2. Deployment of a small group of professionals – ideally, and in my opinion – from within the States Attorney's Office – that is focused on providing advocacy for victims of sex trafficking while identifying and prosecuting sex traffickers. These professionals would work collaboratively with BPD in identifying and working with sex trafficking victims, collecting accurate data on the magnitude of the crime in the city, disrupting other associated crimes, and to be part of the coordination of various services for the long-term changes in the needs of the lives of victims, and to the benefit of Baltimore.

I thank you for this time and look forward to further discussions on the work we can all contribute to address the needs, and stem the tide of human trafficking in our city.