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## Bill criminalizes human trafficking, for labor exploitation

Version doesn't provide victim aid

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FRANKFORT, Ky. -- A bill that would make it a crime to exploit people for forced labor, domestic work or sex passed the Senate yesterday and moves on to the House.

Senate Bill 43, which passed unanimously and without debate, sets penalties for human trafficking but does not include provisions from the original bill that would establish services for victims.

Proponents say making the practice a crime is a good start; once the law is enforced they would return to the legislature to ask for money for victim assistance.

"We understand this is not a budget year, and I think we're fully prepared to come back to the General Assembly once the law is on the books," said Cori Hash, a legal-aid lawyer in Lexington.

She said cases of human trafficking have begun to surface in Kentucky, which is why proponents argued the state should join 27 others that have similar laws.

Sen. David Boswell, D-Owensboro, said the victims' services were removed from the bill because of concerns about spending money in a non-budget year.

"I think it's a great beginning, what we've done today," Boswell said.

The U.S. State Department estimates as many as 17,500 people are trafficked in the country each year, including juveniles and adults. They include illegal immigrants and citizens who are forced to work as nannies, housekeepers and prostitutes.

Groups backing the bill include the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, the Kentucky Office of Legal Services and the Kentucky Domestic Violence Association.

The Justice Department enforces a federal human trafficking law but has encouraged states to pass their own laws.

The bill is racing against time for final passage, with just seven days left of the session.

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