



News Release

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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Attorney General Alan Wilson Applauds Passage of Human Trafficking Bill *S. 196 Authorizes State Grand Jury to Investigate Human Trafficking*

(COLUMBIA, S.C.) Attorney General Alan Wilson applauded the adoption of the Conference Report on S. 196 which provides meaningful tools to investigate human trafficking cases statewide. This piece of legislation, which had unanimous support in both chambers, has been one of the Attorney General's top legislative priorities and is urgently needed by prosecutors and local law enforcement. The measure now heads to Governor Nikki Haley for her signature.

"This is a major step forward to combat human trafficking in our own backyard," Wilson said. "This provides prosecutors and local law enforcement with a new weapon in the fight against modern-day slavery. Thanks to the authorization provided by this bill, human trafficking cases can now be sent to the State Grand Jury and are no longer restricted by local jurisdictional boundaries. The hunt for offenders can go anywhere in South Carolina where the investigation leads. Local law enforcement has told us, 'they can't stop finding human traffickers.' Now, we have a much better chance of bringing them to justice."

Attorney General Wilson has not been alone in the push for this legislation. On January 6, just days before the 2015 legislative session convened, he was joined by numerous legislators, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, victims and community advocates at a news conference to highlight the need for the bill, and to explain why State Grand Jury jurisdiction would enhance efforts to find and prosecute human traffickers.

S. 196 (Hutto) first passed the Senate on February 4th and H. 3125 (Quinn) first passed the House on February 11th. Since February, both chambers traded amendments and versions before reaching a final conference report last week. "The General Assembly's ability to accomplish this significant piece of legislation before recess was enabled by the hard work of dozens of legislators and would not have occurred without the leadership of Senate Judiciary Chairman Larry Martin along with the statesmanship of Senators Brad Hutto and Wes Hayes and the efforts of House Speaker Jay Lucas, House Judiciary Chairman Greg Delleney, along with Representatives David Weeks, Ralph Kennedy, Rick Quinn, and Eddie Tallon."

In 2012, the Attorney General's office championed the state's first Human Trafficking bill, which the General Assembly passed unanimously. The Polaris Project, a human trafficking advocacy group, noted that South Carolina went from having some of the worst human trafficking laws in the nation to some of the best.

"The 2012 legislation clearly indicated lawmakers intended for the State Grand Jury to be able to investigate human trafficking cases," Wilson explained. "But that requires authorization by the General Assembly. In an oversight, legislators didn't pass the companion measure. The adoption of S. 196 rectifies that. Human traffickers can no longer hide by scurrying from county to county. Wherever they go, law enforcement and prosecutors are now able to go after them with the full force of the law."

The State Grand Jury will be able to look into human trafficking cases as soon as the measure is signed into law by Governor Haley.

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