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## Editorials

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### **Editorial: Stopping the cycle of sex trafficking and exploitation**

Several bills moving through the Legislature would strengthen the state's efforts to fight modern-day slavery. These measures have bipartisan support and deserve passage.

Seattle Times Editorial

AS many as 500 girls, some as young as 11 years old, are forced to work as prostitutes every day in King County. By the time these kids become adults, their efforts to turn their lives around can be stymied by long rap sheets.

State lawmakers can help sex workers escape "the life" for good by passing Substitute House Bill 1292, a measure that would allow victims to petition a judge to clear their criminal records of prostitution-related convictions.

The bill passed the state House in January and awaits a hearing in the Senate Law & Justice Committee, where it stalled last session. Chairman Mike Padden, R-Spokane, said he will schedule a public hearing. His committee should go even further. Send the bill to the floor for a full vote.

The Seattle Police Department supports SHB 1292 because it recognizes that most trafficking victims have been abused or neglected, making them more susceptible to exploitation by pimps who lure them with promises of a better life. Since 95 percent of prostitution is controlled by pimps, sex workers are often coerced into committing crimes against their will.

These victims need a clean slate so they can rebuild their lives.

Several other trafficking measures deserve passage, including:

- Substitute Senate Bill 6434 addresses the demand problem by penalizing johns who engage in sexual acts with minors. If passed, authorities would be allowed to seize patrons' vehicles and money used during the crime.
- Substitute Senate Bill 6435 would force those convicted of sexually exploiting children to pay for the cost of victims' losses, including medical services, therapy and legal fees.

National anti-slavery advocacy groups such as Polaris Project and Shared Hope International give Washington top marks for crafting legislation that treats modern-day slaves as victims rather than criminals.

But trafficking persists.

Lawmakers must do more to prevent and save children from losing their futures to the vicious cycle of the commercial sex trade.

*Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Sharon Pian Chan, Lance Dickie, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).*