



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

PITTSBURGH EPISCOPAL AREA

Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference
P.O. Box 5002
1204 Freedom Road
Cranberry Twp., PA 16066

THOMAS J. BICKERTON
RESIDENT BISHOP

William B. Meekins, Jr.
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP

March 21, 2016

Sen. Stewart Greenleaf
Senate Box 203012
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3012

Dear Senator Greenleaf:

Grace and Peace to you.

We, the Pennsylvania bishops of the United Methodist Church, wish to extend our encouragement and support for Senate Bill 851, *Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children*. We commend you for being the prime sponsor of this bill. We stand firmly in opposition to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Furthermore, when children are the victims of these crimes, we find it to be especially reprehensible.

We would like to affirm the intention of SB 851 to develop statewide protocols to provide services and protection for child victims of human trafficking. Furthermore, we recognize the need in this bill to establish funding, law enforcement training and public awareness in support of this effort.

We do not believe children trapped in human trafficking are criminals. Placing them in the juvenile justice system is inappropriate. This results in re-victimization. We support the bill's intention to place such children in the care of the Department of Human Services. No system is perfect and there are likely to be failures in the child welfare system. However, over time, we would expect the Department of Human Services to provide the most satisfactory services for child victims of human trafficking.

Thank you—as well as all the co-sponsors of SB 851—for your leadership on this issue. We want you to know, in the name of the three United Methodist Annual Conferences located in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we appreciate and support this effort to help children who have been trafficked and exploited.

Please accept our sincere prayers for you and your colleagues.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace and Joy,

Thomas J. Bickerton
Resident Bishop
Pittsburgh Area

Peggy A. Johnson
Resident Bishop
Philadelphia Area

Jeremiah Park
Resident Bishop
Harrisburg Area