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Bill Would Train Hotel Workers To Spot Trafficking

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Warning that hotels and motels have replaced Boston's former "Combat Zone" as common venues for exploitation, anti-sexual assault and trafficking advocates are urging lawmakers to require mandatory training that would help workers spot the warning signs of trafficking.

Legislation filed by Rep. Thomas Walsh of Peabody (H 2416) would order hospitality operators to provide a "human trafficking recognition training program" approved by the attorney general for all employees, including how to identify victims and services available to support survivors.

Lisa Goldblatt Grace, co-founder of the My Life My Choice group that works with survivors, said hotels and motels that voluntarily offer that kind of training today are "few and far between."

"There's far less street-based activity than ever before. There's no longer a Combat Zone, per se, here in Boston, and the young people we serve are rarely sold on the street," Goldblatt Grace told the Public Safety Committee Tuesday. "Rather, their exploitation is brokered online, and they're exploited in hotels and motels throughout the commonwealth. Our young people report being exploited in the highest-rent hotels and the lowest-rent motels, where they are kept isolated, where a steady stream of men come through."

"It doesn't have to be this way, though," she added. "The signs are there. Hotel workers can be trained to recognize red flags from the moment they sign someone into the front desk to when they go in to clean the room to the varied signs a security guard can pick up."

The committee gave a favorable report to an earlier draft of the legislation last session, but it died without action in the House Ways and Means Committee. This session, the bill was filed in January 2023 but only emerged for a public hearing Tuesday, just over a week before joint committee are required to make recommendations on the bills in their custody.

Walsh told his colleagues he is "very confident that we can get it over the goal line this year with your assistance."



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