



YOUTH LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Use Your Voice

March 30th, 2023

The Honorable Reginald Jones-Sawyer
Chair, Assembly Public Safety Committee
Legislative Office Building
1020 N Street, Room 111
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: AB 1497 (Haney) - SUPPORT

DEAR ASSEMBLYMEMBER JONES-SAWYER,

Youth Leadership Institute is pleased to support AB 1497 (Haney), which seeks to ensure that no survivors of violence – particularly Black and brown women, youth, queer, or transgender victims – are excluded from legal remedies that open up pathways to healing and a fresh start for them and their families.

yli partners with thousands of youth across the state, the majority of whom are low-income youth of color and are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence.

In California, 34% of women will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. Gender-based violence – including domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual violence – impacts all communities, but Black, brown, and indigenous women and queer and trans people are disproportionately impacted. Black women are almost three times more likely than white women to die at the hands of a current or former partner. More than 80% of American Indian and Alaska Native women had experienced violence in their lifetime, and one in three had experienced violence within the past year. And transgender and gender non-conforming people are six times more likely to be sexually

assaulted as children, have a greater risk of sexual violence across their lifetimes, and are vastly overrepresented in prisons.

A horrifying reality of our current legal system is that over 90% of human trafficking victims are criminalized while being trafficked. Survivors are often arrested and punished simply for protecting their or their family's lives.

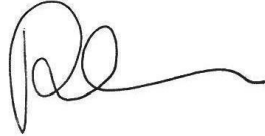
Too often, victims and survivors of violence are blocked from the opportunity to heal because their trauma is used against them, ignored, or not accounted for during legal proceedings. Consequently, judges and juries are left with insufficient information and options to make key decisions about survivors' lives, including in criminal charges and sentencing. The criminalization and penalization of victims by California's legal system leaves survivors without access to healing or crucial resources like housing, employment, education, and financial independence, and subjects them to continued cycles of violence, homelessness, and poverty.

AB 1497 would guarantee that survivors have a chance for their experiences to be heard during legal proceedings as well as a chance to rebuild their lives. Specifically, this bill would:

- Prevent the unjust conviction of victims who survived contexts of abuse, coercion, and exploitation through an expanded affirmative defense.
- Allow judges and jurors to consider an individual's relevant mental health diagnosis and treatment in more cases, broadening key decision-makers' understanding of each individual and their unique circumstances.
- Permit judges to consider survivors' experiences when making sentencing decisions, allowing for the opportunity for healing and family reunification.
- Ensure that no survivors of abuse, coercion, and exploitation are excluded from forms of post-conviction relief that allow survivors a fresh start including access to employment, housing, education, and other opportunities.

For these reasons, Youth Leadership Institute is pleased to support AB 1497 and respectfully requests your "Aye" vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PB', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

PATRICIA BARAHONA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Youth Leadership Institute

CC: Assemblymember Juan Alanis, Vice Chair
Assemblymember Mia Bonta
Assemblymember Isaac Bryan
Assemblymember Tom Lackey
Assemblymember Liz Ortega
Assemblymember Miguel Santiago
Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur