

In support of MN HF 93: Slavery or involuntary servitude prohibited as criminal punishment for crime, and constitutional amendment proposed.



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

1/23/2023

Dear Madam Chair and the Committee:

Founded in 1985, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) is a non-profit organization that is headquartered in Minnesota and has operations in the U.S., Africa and the Middle East. We extend rehabilitative care to survivors of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CIDT); build the capacity of colleague torture rehabilitation programs and human rights defenders worldwide; and engage in advocacy aimed at ending torture and CIDT and supporting the rehabilitation of survivors.

Our Healing, Incarceration, and Policing Program advocates for legislation that uplifts and supports our clients and communities in Minnesota, while increasing equity and accountability in our public safety infrastructure. With our long history of advocating for the basic and most fundamental rights of people, CVT supports HF 93 and urges the Committee to pass this important legislation. It is long past time that our state takes a stand against this law that is a remnant of chattel slavery; involuntary servitude/slavery (IS/S) remains illegal in our state (and country), unless a person is incarcerated for a crime. However, we are a different state than what we were in 1857, when the Constitution of the State of Minnesota was adopted. As a whole, we should be able to accept that IS/S, in any and all cases, is unconscionable, and that those who are incarcerated are still people with basic rights. Their humanity should be respected as such.

When a person is sentenced to imprisonment, that imprisonment is the punishment; CIDT is not included in that sentence. Coercive, degrading, or abusive labor practices undermine our democracy and criminal legal system, in addition to preventing the rehabilitation of people who are incarcerated. As such, this constitutional amendment is vital to the betterment of public safety in the long term, and will benefit the lives of many in the short term. Our legislature has the opportunity to be a leader on this issue by adding Minnesota to the list of, currently only eight, states that do not have an exception for IS/S written into their constitutions. It is past time. This can be done, is imperative to maintain the integrity of our state's values, and establishes an expectation/standard for fair and humane treatment in our prisons.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

On behalf of CVT:

Ta'Mara Hill, Policy Officer
Healing, Incarceration, & Policing Program