

# SESTA Passes Senate

## *Polaris hails passage of bill protecting survivors online, urges Congress to reauthorize TVPA*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** (March 21, 2018) – Polaris applauded the U.S. Senate today after the chamber passed the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA). The legislation was spearheaded by Sens. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), with a version passing the House by 388 to 25 in late February. SESTA provides a much-needed update to the Communications Decency Act (CDA) to help hold websites like Backpage accountable when they knowingly facilitate sex trafficking. Polaris worked with Sens. Portman and Blumenthal, human trafficking advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, technology sector leaders, and survivors to craft compromise language that could pass Congress while protecting both First Amendment rights and people from being exploited online.

With passage of SESTA, Polaris urges Congress to turn its attention to reauthorizing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which expired in Sept. 2017. The TVPA provides the legal foundation in the United States to combat human trafficking and authorizes the federal funds used to provide essential domestic and international anti-trafficking programs to support to victims and survivors.

### **Joe Racalto, Polaris’s Director of Government Relations, said:**

*“We can’t thank Senators Portman and Blumenthal enough for their leadership stewarding SESTA through Congress, crafting a targeted bill with broad bipartisan support. We also thank Senator Wyden for his passion to deliver more funding to combat human trafficking, and we look forward to continuing to work with him. Most especially, SESTA passed thanks to the tireless efforts of survivor advocates who relentlessly fought to help keep others from facing exploitation online as the result of websites that knowingly facilitate human trafficking.*

*“Congress’s work is far from over, though. By allowing cornerstone legislation to expire last year that provides the United States the framework and funding needed to help survivors, Congress is impeding the nation’s ability to combat human trafficking. We urge Congress to reauthorize the Trafficking Victims Protection Act as quickly as possible.”*

**SESTA BACKGROUND:** SESTA is bipartisan legislation that enables state law enforcement officials to take legal action against individuals or businesses that violate federal sex trafficking laws without inadvertently affecting good actors who are not knowingly facilitating sex trafficking. SESTA also clarifies that victims of sex trafficking can seek civil remedy against the websites that facilitated their victimization. The National Human Trafficking Hotline, which is operated by Polaris, has received nearly 2,000 reports of sex trafficking that were facilitated through online advertisements.

**TVPA BACKGROUND:** The [Trafficking Victims Protection Act](#) (TVPA) originally passed in 2000 and has been reauthorized four times since. Three bills were introduced in 2017 to reauthorize the TVPA, either in whole or in part, ahead of its expiration in Sept. 2017: The *Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017* (H.R. 2200) introduced by Reps. Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Karen Bass (D-CA); the *Abolish Human Trafficking Act of 2017* (S. 1311) introduced by Sens. John

Cornyn (R-TX) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN); and the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2017* (S. 1312) introduced by Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA). Polaris is supportive of all three of the bills. Along with reauthorizing funding to combat trafficking, the bills contain a number of new provisions aimed at addressing current policy gaps. In particular, they strengthen the Department of State's Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report by ensuring countries are more accurately analyzed and ranked. It also exempts restitution for trafficking survivors from federal taxes, bolsters efforts to keep goods made from forced labor from entering the United States, and increases support for the U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking.

**People can be connected to help or report a tip of suspected human trafficking by calling the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, texting "BeFree" (233733), or chatting at [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org).**

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### **About Polaris**

*Polaris is a leader in the global fight to eradicate modern slavery. Named after the North Star that guided slaves to freedom in the U.S., Polaris acts as a catalyst to systemically disrupt the human trafficking networks that rob human beings of their lives and their freedom. By working with government leaders, the world's leading technology corporations, and local partners, Polaris equips communities to identify, report, and prevent human trafficking. Our comprehensive model puts victims at the center of what we do – helping survivors restore their freedom, preventing more victims, and leveraging data and technology to pursue traffickers wherever they operate. Learn more at [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org).*

## **Experts**

### **Joe Racalto**

*Director of Government Relations*

