FREE HUMAN PROJECT

A world free of exploitation is possible. You can help.

Testimony in Support of House Bill 5288

Michigan House of Representatives
Economic Competitiveness Committee
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Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Jared Rodriguez, and I am co-founder of the Free Human Project, a national nonprofit organization. FHP's goals are to expose, disrupt, and eliminate forced labor from global supply chains while protecting ethical businesses, workers, and taxpayers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of House Bill 5288.

The Free Human Project was created in response to a growing and uncomfortable reality: forced labor is not a foreign or abstract problem. It's embedded in global supply chains that touch American consumers, American businesses, and state economic development programs funded by taxpayers.

Globally, forced labor generates more than $236 billion annually, enriching traffickers, corporations, and governments that exploit human beings for profit. Millions of people, particularly ethnic and religious minorities, are subjected to state-imposed forced labor through coercion, surveillance, and economic punishment. One of the most well-documented examples is the forced labor of the Uyghurs ("wee-gr"), a mostly Muslim ethnic minority group in central Asia, whose exploitation has been recognized by the United States Congress and addressed through the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, or UFLPA.

Because forced labor is intentionally hidden deep inside supply chains, governments must be proactive, not reactive. That is exactly what House Bill 5288 does.

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HB 5288 ensures that Michigan taxpayer dollars are not used to subsidize or reward companies connected to forced labor by tying the state's economic development programs to clear, objective federal enforcement standards. Specifically, this bill:

- Prohibits the State of Michigan from entering into new or amended economic development agreements with companies that appear on the UFLPA Entity List, a list maintained by a federal task force chaired by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security;
- Requires clawback provisions in state economic development contracts so that if a company is later added to the UFLPA Entity List, it must repay 100 percent of any incentives or subsidies received, plus a penalty; and
- Applies these protections not only to future agreements, but to existing contracts, ensuring Michigan is not exposed to ongoing risk.

From an economic competitiveness standpoint, this matters.

Forced labor functions like an illegal subsidy. It allows bad actors to artificially lower costs, undercut ethical Michigan companies, and distort fair competition. When responsible businesses lose contracts to companies that rely on exploitation, Michigan's economy suffers, and taxpayers unknowingly absorb the risk.

HB 5288 does not create new federal standards, nor does it ask businesses to navigate unclear rules. Instead, it aligns Michigan's economic development policies with existing federal law, providing clarity, certainty, and protection for companies that are operating in good faith.

The Free Human Project works with businesses, investigators, and policymakers to help identify forced-labor risk before it becomes a liability. Our goal is not punishment, it's prevention. This bill reflects that same philosophy. It encourages compliance, protects ethical employers, and ensures Michigan's incentives reward innovation and integrity, not exploitation.

In closing, House Bill 5288 is both morally right and economically smart. It safeguards public dollars, strengthens fair competition, and sends a clear message that Michigan's economic success will never be built on human suffering.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge your support of House Bill 5288.

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MICHIGAN
HB 5288
SB 715

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Uyghur *("wee-gr")*

A mostly Muslim ethnic minority group in central Asia.

Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA)

A federal law passed in 2021 to help prevent goods made by forced labor from entering the American market.

UFLPA Entity List

One method of UFLPA enforcement. Maintained by a task force chaired by the Dept. of Homeland Security, entities added to the list face a rebuttable presumption that they use forced labor and may not import goods to the U.S.

Forced labor generates $236 billion per year for traffickers, businesses and governments who exploit their fellow humans for financial gain, including nearly 4 million people who toil in state-imposed forced labor around the world each day.

Ethnic minority groups in countries without strong human rights protections are particularly at risk of state-imposed forced labor abuse.

Uyghurs are one group who are suffering under conditions of state-imposed forced labor today, **including coerced relocation for factory work, long hours for little or no pay, close government surveillance and control, ideologic indoctrination, and isolation from family and friends.**

Because forced labor can easily be hidden deep inside supply chains, it is critical for governments at every level to actively monitor known abuses and take steps to eradicate modern slavery.

HB 5288 and SB 715 will help prevent Michiganders' tax dollars from subsidizing, incentivizing, or otherwise benefitting companies whose practices contribute to the modern enslavement of Uyghurs by:

- Prohibiting the state from entering into economic development deals with companies that appear on the UFLPA Entity List;
- Requiring that all new or amended economic development contracts the state executes include a clawback provision that requires companies to pay back 100% of any subsidies or incentives they've received plus a 10% penalty if they are added to the UFLPA Entity List at any point; and
- Requiring that the same provision be amended into every currently existing economic development deal

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