

## STATE ADVOCACY

### MESSAGING GUIDE: VACATUR LAWS

#### How to Use This Messaging Guide

Advocates looking to advance Vacatur Laws can help raise awareness by writing and publishing op-eds, blogs, or letters to the editor. These are all great ways to engage a broad audience, respond to an opposing point of view in the public forum, and highlight key information for potential supporters. **You can use the following messages to effectively write op-eds, blogs, and letters to the editor about passing or strengthening a Vacatur Law in your state.**

#### Key Points

- ▶ Survivors of trafficking should not be punished for the crimes of their traffickers.
- ▶ Vacatur Laws help survivors of trafficking rebuild their lives.
- ▶ Our Jewish values teach us *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof* — the pursuit of justice. It is unjust for survivors of trafficking to be punished for the crimes their traffickers forced them to commit; rather than holding survivors of trafficking responsible for their own exploitation, we must help them rebuild their lives.

#### Supporting Points

##### **Survivors of trafficking should not be punished for the crimes of their traffickers.**

- ▶ Vacatur Laws recognize that trafficking victims are not responsible for the criminal activity in which they have been forced to engage.
- ▶ Vacatur Laws permit courts to vacate — legally rendering null and void — convictions for prostitution related offenses and other nonviolent crimes that victims of trafficking were forced to commit.

##### **Vacatur Laws help survivors of trafficking rebuild their lives.**

- ▶ A criminal record creates a very real barrier for individuals seeking employment, education, housing, loans, and a host of other services.
- ▶ The stigma of having criminal convictions hinders the ability of sex trafficking survivors to reintegrate into their communities.
- ▶ A clean record will enable survivors to have a second chance to thrive.

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- ▶ While survivors of sex trafficking have indeed engaged in prostitution, which is a crime, they do not deserve a criminal conviction. They were forced or coerced to engage in this criminal activity by a trafficker.

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- ▶ A full Vacatur Law recognizes that survivors of sex trafficking are often coerced to engage in several types of crime by their traffickers, such as selling drugs or committing theft. It is unfair to hold them responsible for this.
- ▶ By passing Vacatur Laws, state lawmakers will be correcting an injustice.

## Pro Tips

- ▶ Make sure to personalize the piece with a relevant story, or your motivations for getting involved in this work.
- ▶ In your piece, make sure to include each of the three key points outlined above, and use the provided supporting points to back up your claims.
- ▶ For further guidance, check out NCJW's tips on writing [op-eds](#), [blogs](#), and [letters to the editor](#).

## Questions?

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