

## The Tribune

### Defeat of Jordan Cunningham's human trafficking bill defies logic

By Andrea Seastrand

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Because California's Legislature and governor are unwilling to make common-sense public safety policies, ballot propositions are quickly becoming the only recourse to bring sanity back to our state.

Part of the problem is that few lawmakers have ever held a position in law enforcement, which means they have little practical experience in the criminal justice system to guide their decision making. The choices made in Sacramento have real-world consequences for the safety of millions of Californians, yet the Capitol is dominated by ideologically driven debates instead of fact-driven discussions. With lawmakers like this, it's no wonder the soft-on-crime mentality is overtaking California.

To see this in action, take a recent example from a bill introduced this year by our local assemblyman, Jordan Cunningham, who is the exception in Sacramento by having valuable, real-world experience as a prosecutor. He presented a perfectly reasonable proposal to the Assembly Public Safety Committee, which, despite its name, ironically holds some of the most extreme views in the Legislature.

Cunningham's bill, [AB 1738](#), was common sense to most people. It would require an adult who knowingly solicits a prostitute under the age of 18 to register as a sex offender for 20 years. Considering a person under 18 is under the age of consent, this would be consistent with why the sex offender registry was created.

The bill was designed to be a deterrent to the rapidly growing problem of human trafficking in California, [which has one of the highest rates per capita](#) of any state in the country. Because there is strong demand for minors among those looking to purchase sex, this unfortunately makes them the most frequently sought-out victims for human traffickers. Despite this, the Democratic chair of the committee, Reggie Jones-Sawyer, killed Cunningham's bill on a [party-line vote](#) after it was opposed by the ACLU and public defenders who claimed there were already too many people registered as sex offenders.

It's difficult to understand this logic. By its definition, someone who knowingly solicits an underage prostitute is a sexual predator. Requiring these individuals to register as sex offenders would certainly act as a strong deterrent and help reduce the demand for the unconscionable crime of trafficking young people into the sex trade. Yet in California, it's a sad day when perspectives have become so warped that protecting children isn't even a consideration.

Despite running into a brick wall of ideological opposition, Cunningham deserves credit for being a voice for the public in the backwards environment of the Legislature. Unlike most of his colleagues who have no understanding of what it actually takes to investigate, arrest and put a criminal in prison, Assemblyman Cunningham's experience as a prosecutor means he can cut through smoke screens and half-truths used to justify poorly crafted public safety laws.

Cunningham's career has consisted of time as an attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice and as a deputy district attorney here in San Luis Obispo County. This is the kind of professional experience that gives insight into how criminals operate and the tools law enforcement needs to fight back against them. That's a big reason why he is one of the strongest advocates for common sense criminal justice laws in Sacramento.

And despite what we see time and again from the soft-on-crime mentality in Sacramento, it's not all bad news because we at least have the ability to circumvent the Legislature via the initiative process. This means that common sense has a chance of prevailing—something that sadly isn't possible in today's current political environment.

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