



*The Amara Legal Center envisions a society where our clients are free from stigma, violence, oppression, exploitation, and criminalization.*

## Welcome Manuel Vasquez to the Amara Board of Directors

Please join Amara in welcoming Manuel Vasquez to the Board of Directors!

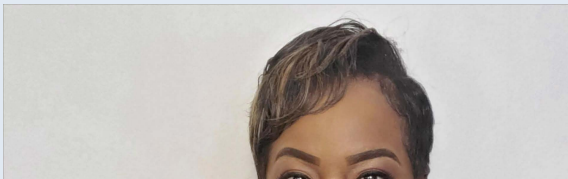
Manuel, who likes to be called Manny, is from Northern Virginia, and a son of Salvadoran immigrant parents. Manny is eager to bring his experience in Big 4 Accounting Firms, IT Audit, and Cyber Security to the Amara Legal Center.

Manny has a Bachelor of Science in Accounting, Masters of Science in Accounting, and a Graduate Certificate in Forensic Accounting from George Mason University. At the beginning of his career, Manny focused on Financial Management consulting, and later transitioned to IT Audit and IT Advisory. Currently Manny works as an IT Audit Manager within the Healthcare industry.



"I'm looking forward to bringing my experience and specialty to the Amara Legal Center to help grow the organization and increase the awareness in the community about the organization's mission."

## Register for Amara's March 17th "Circle of Hope" Speaker Series with Shamere McKenzie



Celebrate Women's History Month with Amara and join us on March 17th, from 12pm-1pm, for our "Circle of Hope" Speaker Series featuring Shamere McKenzie.



Shamere is a consultant, activist, subject matter expert on human trafficking and a sought-after award winning internationally recognized speaker and trainer. Turning her past adversities into an opportunity to liberate and protect others, Shamere has brought about social and political change in America and around the world.

She has a strong passion for education and policy and is the CEO for the Sun Gate Foundation, an anti-trafficking organization that provides educational opportunities for survivors of human trafficking.

She also serves as the Training Manager for the National Human Trafficking Hotline and is the co-chair for the victim's services committee of the MD State Human Trafficking Task Force.

[Register Today](#)

## End the Criminalization of Child Sex Trafficking Victims in Maryland

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, 95 sex trafficking cases were reported in Maryland in 2020 and 41 human trafficking cases involved minors. When child trafficking victims are convicted of prostitution or related offenses, they are often transferred from the control of a trafficker to the control of the criminal legal system. HB833/SB768, Maryland's Safe Harbor Law, prevents minors (any child under 18) from being prosecuted for prostitution or related offenses and directs juvenile sex trafficking victims to non-punitive specialized services in Maryland.



This bill recognizes that minors, by virtue of their age, are especially vulnerable to being trafficked and should not be penalized by the legal system for their own victimization. Safe Harbor Laws protect child victims of sex trafficking from unjust criminalization.

**Contact your Maryland State Senators and House Delegates today and urge them to vote in favor of this important bill!**

[Support Safe Harbor Law in Maryland](#)

Virginia House Courts of Justice Committee  
Kills Safe Harbor Bill in Virginia:  
Press Release from Amara & VCAHT



The Virginia Senate bill, SB664, also known as Safe Harbor or non-criminalization of juveniles, prevents minors (any child under 18) from being prosecuted for prostitution and directs juvenile sex trafficking victims to non-punitive specialized services in Virginia.

On February 28, the Virginia House Courts of Justice Committee voted against passing SB664, without giving the bill a hearing or listening to testimony from concerned individuals and advocacy groups. Introduced by Senator J. Chapman Petersen (D), the bill was passed by the Virginia Senate with strong bipartisan support. Amara and the Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking (VCAHT) issued a press release today.

“Shame on those members of the House of Delegates who voted against this bill for not protecting trafficked children. Their votes represent a slap in the face of Virginia’s youngest citizens,” said Carole Bernard, Amara Legal Center CEO. “This bill would have ensured that trafficked children are treated as victims by the systems that are governed to protect them, not as criminals. Children suffer extreme trauma from being trafficked. Criminalizing these young people instead of providing them with access to medical care, safe housing, educational opportunities, and counseling services is a public policy travesty.”

[Read our Joint Press Release](#)

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ACCESS JUSTICE & PAVE  
A PATH TOWARDS  
HEALING!**



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