



FEBRUARY 26, 2014

THE STATE OF EFFORTS TO STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

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WOLF OPENING STATEMENT AT TRAFFICKING HEARING

Washington, D.C. (February 26, 2014) – Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), chairman of the House Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) Appropriations subcommittee, made the following opening statement at a CJS hearing today on sex trafficking:

“A few years ago, a local church group sought my assistance to help end human trafficking in Thailand and Albania. I was happy to lend my support, but pointed out that sex trafficking wasn’t just occurring in faraway places. It was happening just across the river in northern Virginia and across the U.S.

“We can – and we must – confront this injustice. I have long admired the abolitionist efforts of William Wilberforce. Many have called human trafficking the slavery issue of our day. Ending this insidious criminal will require the same doggedness that Wilberforce exhibited.

“This committee has been very active on this issue for a number of years. Most recently, the CJS portion of the 2014 omnibus spending bill signed into laws last month includes a number of provisions to help combat trafficking.

“The bill directs the FBI to increase the amount of resources dedicated to human trafficking, improve coordination with other law enforcement agencies to better address trafficking and regularly report to Congress on what it is doing to fight trafficking.

“The Attorney General is required to submit a comprehensive report on all DOJ anti- trafficking activities, including legislative proposals to bolster anti-trafficking enforcement.

“The Justice Department is required to detail action it has taken to investigate allegations of human trafficking or abuse of nonimmigrant visa holders to enforce a policy of zero tolerance for sex and labor trafficking by federal contractors.

“The U.S. Attorneys are expected to maintain their human trafficking task forces and continue to undertake proactive investigations, including investigations of persons or entities facilitating trafficking in persons through the use of classified advertising on the Internet.

“Finally, the Justice Department must continue its outreach in the form of public notices with regard to the prevalence of human trafficking activities and report to the subcommittee on its efforts

“The bill also provides nearly \$14.25 million for grants to help victims of trafficking and \$67 million for missing and exploited children programs.

“It also should be noted that in addition to the language on trafficking, the bill provides \$417 million for the Office of Violence Against Women, which is higher than both the FY 2013 level and the president’s 2014 budget request.

“Today, we will hear from four witnesses to learn about the state of efforts to halt and prevent

the trafficking of human beings and to ask what more can this can this Congress do?

“Just last week, a jury convicted an Indiana man for human trafficking. The man forced four women – including a 16-year-old girl – into prostitution. As DOJ noted in its press release announcing the conviction, ‘they did this, in part, by posting photographs of the females on backpage.com.’

“Unfortunately, this is an all too common pattern.

“Last March, an Atlanta man pleaded guilty in federal court in Alexandria to ‘running a commercial sex business that prostituted multiple juvenile girls in Herndon, Virginia, and other locations throughout Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.’

“The FBI press release announcing the guilty plea specifically mentioned the website: ‘Daily, the enterprise posted multiple advertisements on Backpage.com, and sometimes within minutes customers would call.’

“And now we see Backpage.com being used in places like Winchester, Virginia, which is a city in the western part of my District. There have been two instances in recent weeks where arrests have been made in relation to ads on Backpage.com.

“During the Super Bowl, the FBI conducted an operation targeting child sex trafficking, which resulted in the rescue of 16 children and the arrest of 45 pimps and their associates. According to the Newark *Star-Ledger*, some of these arrests were made by FBI agents posing as “Johns” and responding to ads on sites like Backpage.com

“At the recent NBA All-Star weekend in New Orleans, 30 people were arrested in connection with sex trafficking. According to law enforcement officials, women were brought in from across the country: California; Florida; Illinois; Missouri; Ohio; Tennessee and Texas to engage in sex-related crimes during the weekend.

“On this topic, I especially want to thank Cindy McCain, who will be testifying today, for helping to raise awareness of the problem of sex trafficking at the Super Bowl and other large sporting events. You may have seen her recent op-ed in the *Washington Post* on this subject.

“The subcommittee has jurisdiction over funding for the Department of Justice, and I want to thank the FBI agents, Director Comey and former Director Mueller, as well as the U.S. Attorneys for their work to bring these traffickers to justice. At the same time, I am concerned about actions the department has NOT taken.

“The subcommittee directed the department to report on the effectiveness of existing laws and authorities to go after websites such as Backpage.com – not just the traffickers that advertise on them. The report was due on April 25, 2013. That was 10 months ago. To date, the subcommittee has yet to see it.

“I have personally written the Attorney General several times over the last two year urging the department to prosecute Backpage.com and similar sites. I am submitting copies of all the letters today for the hearing record.

“In these letters I repeatedly wrote that if the department was of the view that current law would not support such action, then provide a legal analysis and possible legislative language for how this could be remedied.

“Many of my letters went unanswered, and the responses I did receive, failed to address my primary concern with respect to Backpage.com. I have even urged, without effect, Attorney General Holder to publicly call out Backpage.com and similar sites to at least add an element of shame in the public square. The Attorney General is failing.

“There is much more that can be done to tackle this problem, and I am confident that today’s witnesses will shine even more light on the matter.

“First we will hear from Stephanie Vu, a human trafficking survivor and advocate. Stephanie frequently works in conjunction with two non- profit organizations: Shared Hope International and Youth for Tomorrow, which is the northern Virginia charity founded by Joe Gibbs. These two non-profits are involved in stopping human trafficking and aiding survivors.

“After her will be Detective Bill Woolf of the Fairfax County Police Department, who is on the front lines of dealing with this problem. He and his colleagues in northern Virginia are making a difference. I know several of Detective Woolf’s fellow officers are here today and I want acknowledge them. As the son of a police officer, I know what you do every day. Thank you.

“Det. Woolf was featured in the article from *Washingtonian Magazine* staff circulated last week. In case you missed it, here let me read you the title and how it opens: “*You’re Pretty – You Could Make Some Money. In the affluent Northern Virginia suburbs, a shocking problem has taken root: Police and federal agents have taken down dozens of juvenile sex traffickers in the last two years alone. Here’s how one gang recruited teenagers through Facebook, at Metro Stations and shopping malls – even in the halls of Fairfax County Public Schools.*”

“After hearing from them, we will begin our second panel, where we will hear from Cindy McCain, who is a national leader in anti-trafficking efforts and is co-chairperson of the Arizona Governor’s Task Force on Human Trafficking.

“We will also hear from John Ryan, who is the President and CEO of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.”

**Testimony before the
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies**

“The State of Efforts to Stop Human Trafficking”

February 26, 2014

**Stephanie Vu
Survivor, Advocate and Advisor to Shared Hope International and Youth For Tomorrow**

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am a survivor of domestic minor sex trafficking.

Domestic minor sex trafficking is the name we have given to the sexual exploitation of U.S. citizen children through prostitution, pornography and sexual entertainment. The name reflects the fact that this exploitation is human trafficking as defined in the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA).¹ The victims of domestic minor sex trafficking—boys and girls averaging 12-14 years old at the time of their initial exploitation through prostitution—number at least 100,000 each year according to conservative estimates.

I survived sex trafficking and now provide experiential advice to two anti-trafficking organizations critical to my escape from exploitation. Shared Hope International has been working to rescue and restore women and children who suffer the devastating effects of sex trafficking, and prevent the spread of this crisis. Youth For Tomorrow has developed specialized trauma-centered services and shelter for victims of domestic minor sex trafficking, like me.

At the age of 12, I became a victim of sex trafficking. I was invited to a party and there I met a handsome older boy who took a lot of interest in me. Although flattered, I never thought I would see him again. Strangely, I did see him again—and again and again as I encountered him at the grocery store, Starbucks, everywhere it seemed I went. In my 12 year old mind, I was convinced this was fate and soon began intentionally meeting him every chance I had.

My mother, a military wife, worked day and night to support our family while my father was fighting in Iraq. My job was to watch my younger siblings, but there was little supervision for me, leaving me free to go on “dates” with this charming, older boy. I was searching for something in life and he looked like the answer, filling my loneliness and my young heart’s desire for love and romance. I soon learned though that he was a “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” with calculated designs on turning me into a product to be devoured.

For a while it seemed my dreams had come true. He said he loved me and wanted to marry me; he bought nice things for me and took me out for dinner and to clubs and places I could never go to without him. However, in just a few months he demanded a return—I was sent to perform in a strip club. I did not want to, but he insisted he needed my help to escape a financial pinch and I naively felt that I owed him something. And so it began. I began skipping school and dancing in the strip clubs. It was degrading, but he would keep me under his control by saying and doing things that convinced me that I was doing it for him and for us. At the age of 13, I was too young to see that my life was no longer my own. I became a domestic minor sex trafficking victim.

Soon my trafficker asked for something more than dancing. I was told I would sell my body for sex acts. I will never forget this night for as long as I live. I refused but he threw me out of the house on that cold night, telling me to make the money or freeze out there. My clothing was inappropriate for the weather. I

¹ Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, Division A, § 103(8), (9), 114 Stat. 1464 (signed into law on October 29, 2000); codified as amended at 22 USC 7102 § 103(8), (9).

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was cold and I paced the streets. But the buyers were flagging me down and after a few hours of cold, I was hungry and could not feel my feet or hands. In desperation, I finally accepted one and climbed into the car.

The moment I stepped into that car my life was changed forever. There were three men that night; at the end of it I couldn't stop vomiting. So began endless nights of selling my body for my trafficker. I descended into depression. I drank alcohol and took drugs to dull the pain. The lifestyle I was living proved to me that this was all I was worth. I made the money my trafficker demanded and learned to live with his constant abuse and the abuse of the friends he would allow to "borrow" me.

Finally one night the police picked me up and recognized me as a reported missing child. I was returned home but quickly returned to my trafficker, and later I was arrested again. This time I was sent to juvenile detention where my probation officer seemed to suspect my victimization, but I denied that I was being trafficked and again was sent home on probation. A few days later, my trafficker exacted revenge for my not returning to him—I was raped in front of my home.

At this point I had finally had enough. At just 15 years old, I was ready to give up on life. I was so badly violated that I had to be hospitalized and while I was there my probation officer reached out to Linda Smith of Shared Hope International knowing that I could not return to my mother's house and hoping she could help. Linda conducted a search around the nation to find someplace where I would be safe and where they had the skills to address my need for emotional, physical and psychological healing. Finally, she located Youth For Tomorrow in Virginia—3,000 miles from my home. I had to come so far to have a chance to heal. I had to leave my frightened mother and my siblings because there was no place closer to home that could help me. I was tremendously reluctant then, but so grateful now for the chance to begin a new life. The day I was released from the hospital, Linda arranged for me to move into the most beautiful hotel room until I could be safely relocated. The memory of the view from that room—the view of freedom—still brings tears to my eyes.

Sadly my story of seduction and enslavement is not unique. Many go through what I did, and much more. I have seen girls younger than I was trafficked, and girls much older that had been exploited since they were my age. Most have not yet seen hope because, sadly, the story of my restoration is unique. Here is why:

1. Misidentification

Child sex trafficking victims are frequently misidentified as delinquents, runaways, and homeless. Misidentification causes a chain reaction of negative outcomes. It is the reason many victims do not access services. It is often the cause of detention as a criminal. I was misidentified many times until, finally, a probation officer who knew about sex trafficking spotted the signs in me and got me the help I needed.

Shared Hope International's *National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*² states that in Las Vegas, 226 juveniles came before the Juvenile Court judge in just 20 months and in Dallas 165 juveniles were detained on prostitution and related charges in 2007 alone. These are numbers from just two cities—the real numbers in the communities across our country are certainly much

² http://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SHI_National_Report_on_DMST_2009.pdf

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larger. A child defined by the federal TVPA as a victim, is arrested for the crime committed against her. This arrest and treatment of the victim as a criminal is a secondary violence committed against her, compounding the trauma of the sexual violence she has already endured at the hands of the trafficker and the multitude of buyers who have used her.

2. No Placement Options

For those in law enforcement who recognize the exploitation the domestic minor sex trafficking victim is experiencing and want to take a victim-centered approach to the investigation, the lack of secure shelter is cited as the biggest problem they face. Law enforcement officers report they must charge a domestic minor sex trafficking victim in order to detain her in a secured facility to keep her safe from the pimp and the trauma-driven flight response. Rarely are services essential to a victim of sex trafficking provided in detention. Also, entry into the delinquency system can disqualify a victim from accessing victim of crime funds for services in some states. Without access to secure shelter in some form it becomes nearly impossible to protect the child victim of sex trafficking. Further, law enforcement has come to see the critical part victim services plays in stabilizing the victim to testify in the prosecution of traffickers. Unfortunately, such children often end up waiting for the trial of their exploiter in juvenile detention or in an unsafe placement.

Research by Shared Hope International reveals hundreds of children arrested, charged and prosecuted for prostitution despite their status as minors—and therefore as victims—of domestic minor sex trafficking. Another survivor of domestic minor sex trafficking relates her experience with repeated arrests:

*I was arrested 17 different times in all kinds of cities and every time I went to detention, they thought all they had to do is change where I was. So I ended up in group homes where people had serious drug and mental problems, but not my kind of problem...there was nothing to help me deal with the trauma of what happened to me. I wanted nothing to do with those places. Being with the “family” was at least something I was used to, so I ran away and back to my pimp every time. Each time I was transferred from out of state back to Ohio, it was in handcuffs and leg shackles and I was surrounded by policemen that I felt were my enemies. Despite my age, I spent 8 months in prison when my pimp caught a federal case. Yes, **I’m the one** that went to prison. I could never trust anyone. Sitting in a facility with criminals didn’t help; it only made me more bitter.*

Appropriate protective shelter and services are critical for the protection and restoration of child sex trafficking victims, but they do not exist in most of the country. Being sent home on probation did not address the trauma bonds and fear I lived under that caused me to return to my trafficker.

3. Insufficient Priority on Combating Demand

Buyers are not being recognized as a critical component in the sex trafficking of children; yet demand is the primary driver of the commercial sex industry within which children are being exploited for commercial sex activities and performance. Buyers of sex with children can be preferential (pedophiles), opportunistic (thrill seekers), or situational (do not care how old the person being prostituted is) — they are all committing a crime. I cannot count the number of men who bought sex acts with me every day, purposely, or recklessly, in disregard for my young age.

Innovative investigative techniques like the one originating in the Western District of Missouri are clearing the way for federal prosecutions of buyers under the federal sex trafficking statute. The forward-

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thinking U.S. Attorney’s Office in that district has pursued buyers of commercial sex with children by working with the local human trafficking task force to plan and implement an Internet sting operation designed to satisfy the evidentiary requirements of the federal TVPA—specifically sections 1591 and 2224(b)—using the words “obtain” and “entice” to charge, indict and secure guilty pleas by the offenders. Since this operation, the federal prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of South Dakota have secured the critical Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals opinion that buying, and attempted buying, of commercial sex acts with a victim of trafficking is a criminal offense under the federal sex trafficking statute, 18 U.S.C. § 1591.³ This federal leadership is essential to embolden the states to take action against buyers as well as traffickers.

4. Online Facilitation of Sex Trafficking Unimpeded

The Internet is the new prostitution track. Just as law enforcement patrol prostitution zones in cities across the country, online facilitators of domestic minor sex trafficking must continue to be investigated and stopped. The blockade presented by the federal Communications Decency Act to state prosecution or civil suits by victims is unacceptable and a solution must be found to stop the industry from profiting from the crime of sex trafficking taking place in their webpages.

What can Congress do?

Congress must make domestic minor sex trafficking victim protections, especially development of shelter and services, a priority – the success of combating demand and restoring victims depends on it.

There are actions Congress can take to overcome this primary barrier to the proper response to the victims of domestic minor sex trafficking. First, pass **H.R. 3530** (cross-filed in the Senate as S. 1738), the **“Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act,”** introduced by Rep. Ted Poe and currently co-sponsored by fifty-five members of Congress. Congress has the opportunity and obligation to send a strong message to the fifty states that Congress intends for these children to be treated as victims and to be protected. H.R. 3530 will ensure that shelters and services for domestic minor sex trafficking victims are provided and will empower the law enforcement and prosecutors in up to six funded locations with better resources, investigative tools and staffing to make prosecution a real consequence for engaging in the sale and purchase of sex with a minor child.

A second key action Congress can take to remedy the failure to protect the young victims of this crime is to tie standards of protection and services for the protected class of domestic minor sex trafficking victims to current federal funding streams to the states. Congress can ensure the proper victim rights and treatment for the child sex trafficking victim by requiring certain standards of care and the development and provision of certain protections for the victims by imposing conditions on federal funding to states. **H.R. 3610**, the **“Stop Exploitation Through Trafficking Act of 2013,”** introduced by Rep. Erik Paulsen, attempts to use the power of the purse to move states to take the necessary action to protect child sex trafficking victims from punitive responses for the offenses they commit as a result of their trafficking victimization.

Collaboration was essential to intervene and protect me from my trafficker and the many, many buyers who exploited me for commercial sex acts every night. The U.S. Department of Justice’s Human

³ United States v. Jungers, 702 F.3d 1066 (8th Cir. 2013).

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Trafficking Task Forces bring together federal, state and local law enforcement and prosecutors and victim service organizations to prevent and prosecute human trafficking. The 2013 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act authorized, for the first time, funding specifically and separately for human trafficking task forces focused on all forms of human trafficking. This provides funds to train law enforcement personnel on how to identify severe forms of trafficking and related offenses. More trained law enforcement means more interventions and more survivors.

Conclusion

My journey has made me strong; strong enough to advocate for the victims we might never hear from. My faith in God and His remarkable way of making beauty from the ashes of my life has emboldened me to speak to you on their behalf. The funding of organizations and agencies like the ones I have mentioned is vitally important. Without the intervention and care I accessed through the collaboration of agencies and officials in the place I was being trafficked, I might never have escaped the bonds of my trafficker. I testify before you today as a survivor—one of the lucky ones—and I urge you to bring the funding needed and support the growing body of law designed to stop this crime and protect us, the victims.

For my part, I have shared my story in a critical awareness video produced by Shared Hope International called *Chosen*. It is my hope that it will keep many from the ordeal I endured by alerting them to the techniques used by traffickers and the devastating result of believing their lies. Thank you.

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Written Statement of

William C. Woolf III

Lead Investigator

Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force

Fairfax County Police Department, Virginia

Before the

House Appropriations Committee

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies

Hearing on Sex Trafficking

February 26, 2014

Sex, Money, and the Forgotten Victim

Some of the information and facts contained herein are derived from training and research, but all information and observations are supported by personal experiences and actual investigations and interviews during the course of my tenure as a human trafficking investigator.

Problem

Human Trafficking is a crime that cuts across all races, ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic classes. Traffickers prey on the vulnerabilities of their intended victims, depriving them of their human dignity and worth for the purposes of profit, regardless of the victim's country of birth, background, or age¹. It is a crime that does not discriminate and has increasingly shifted to preying upon the youth in our communities. A crime that was once thought to target intended victims from low socio-economic classes, has become disturbingly more prevalent in some of the most affluent suburbs throughout the United States. It is of note that victims can be exploited in their own states, neighborhoods, schools, churches, or even their own homes. The reality is that our children, one of the most vulnerable and sought-after populations by traffickers, can be exploited on a routine basis by these profit-driven predators and yet may still be coming home every night for dinner, sleeping in their own beds, and going to school every day. Traffickers in some sense are highly sophisticated, deploying new methods of carrying out their criminal enterprises in an effort to thwart efforts by law enforcement to detect, interdict, and dismantle their operations. One of the largest problems faced by the community of professionals working to eradicate sex trafficking, particularly among our teen population, is misidentification, thereby leaving a large group of adolescents that have endured a great deal of trauma and victimization never being formally identified as a victim. These victims

¹ United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report (2013), <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt>

do not receive the services and intervention that they need to help them recover and become productive members of society.

Most people do not believe that human trafficking will ever affect them directly, or believe that it is an international crime that does not have domestic victims. The unsettling truth is that every community and every home in America is at risk to falling victim to human trafficking; the most vulnerable group being our children. It is estimated that at least 100,000 US children are induced into the commercial sex trade every year here in the United States. Because of the lack of acceptance that sex trafficking is a reality in the US, many victims, and the families driven to protect them, adopt the belief that ‘this could never happen to me.’ The lack of awareness as to how traffickers scout, manipulate, and trap juveniles into a life of sexual exploitation and servitude presents a cumbersome problem for law enforcement, educators, social services, and anti-trafficking organizations alike. One can only address a threat appropriately when they are aware the threat exists. The white work van abducting our children from street corners and forcing them into a life of prostitution is very rare. Rather, it is smooth words and empty promises that trap and manipulate children, forcing them into a life of sex with strangers. And as the traffickers exploit technology, specifically social media, to enhance their abilities of recruiting, their presence in the lives of the children becomes more of reality. This reality calls for increased vigilance on the part of parents and society as a whole. It is important to have an understanding of what human trafficking looks like here in the United States to be able to safeguard our children. Awareness of the issue and acceptance that our families are vulnerable is the one of the principle steps in combating human trafficking.

Manifestations of Sex Trafficking

The reality is that sex trafficking, in various forms, does not occur in illegal underground industries hidden from sight, rather most of the illegal operations are facilitated through legitimate commerce. The accessibility of commercial sex, in which the demand is usually met through the criminal operations of a traffickers, is more prevalent in today’s society than it ever has been in the past. Regardless of whether one lives in middle-class suburbia, wealthy downtown business districts or subsidized housing, trafficking is most likely occurring in plain sight. Additionally, there are consumers of sex trafficking within each of these types of neighborhoods. More importantly, the children that are living in each of these environments are also vulnerable to the traffickers’ deceptions

Instances of sex trafficking manifest themselves in three basic forms: brothel networks, pimp-controlled, and gang-controlled. Brothel networks are found in the form of, what appears to be, legitimate commercial establishments or they can also be found in residential neighborhoods. Throughout the United States, law enforcement continues to uncover residential brothels in ‘well-to-do’ gated communities, communities that are not known for being infested with criminal conduct. Within these brothel networks, which appear in many forms, victims usually remain in one location for a determinate period of time, typically one week, and then they are relocated. The victims are forced to remain onsite for the duration and endure long hours, inadequate and

inhumane living conditions under the threat of violence to themselves or their families while engaging in commercial sex. Some of these brothel networks can be localized within a geographic region, such as northern Virginia, or they can be multi-state or multi-national criminal enterprises, often times preying on the vulnerabilities of foreign nationals who are unfamiliar with the laws of the United States.

Pimp-controlled scenarios have become an exponentially greater threat as they are shifting toward recruiting younger victims. Recognizing that the average age of induction into commercial sex in the United States is thirteen (13) years old, it is evident that pimps have resorted to inducing and maintaining younger victims than historically. Pimps will typically advertise using internet-based methods including Backpage.com. These traffickers are using hotel rooms and common forms of public transportation to harbor and transport victims of trafficking. They may be moving juveniles to and from multiple states in an effort to maximize their profit and avoid detection from law enforcement.

One of the most disturbing, but rapidly emerging trends is that of gang-controlled sex trafficking. Gangs, commonly believed to be all about violence, have now learned that the violence simply serves a means to an end; that end being profitable crime. Gangs have learned that sex trafficking, particularly of minors, is a low-risk, high-yield criminal enterprise that adequately funds their gang operations throughout the United States and internationally. Drawing from their reputation of violence, often times glorified through Hollywood, gangs can use the “threat” of violence as a means of control for these vulnerable and uninformed youth.

Profile of the Victims

The traffickers are focusing their recruitment efforts on children because of particular vulnerabilities that impressionable young people possess. These vulnerabilities fall into four main categories: economic vulnerabilities, victims of prior abuse (sexual or physical), situational vulnerabilities (homeless or runaway children), and “other at-risk”, which includes children with low self-esteem, attention-seeking youth, children from homes lacking stability or children who lack an understanding of healthy relationships. It is essential to understand that these “other at-risk” youth are the children in every school, every neighborhood, every church and youth group and potentially in any home. The dynamics of family have changed over the past few decades, and the traffickers have taken note, exploiting those changes in dynamics to draw young people into a life of servitude through false promises and coercion. In these instances, the traffickers never have to provide their victims with monetary rewards; rather they offer love and affection to a child who is not being fulfilled at home².

It can be challenging to sympathize or understand how a person is coerced or induced into engaging in commercial sex by someone simply taking advantage of their personal vulnerabilities. Regardless, it is important to remember that the victimization is the same, whether physical force is utilized or the more pervasive forms of mental manipulation. Arguably,

² Rao, Smriti, & Christina Presenti, *Understanding Human Trafficking Origin: A Cross-Country Empirical Analysis, in Feminist Economics*

coercion to induce someone into a life of servitude and slavery delivers a greater degree of psychological damage because the person was manipulated to believe that he/she was complicit in their own victimization. In situations where the victim believes that they agreed to engage in the conduct, there is an increase in self-blame and personal shame on the part of the victim³. This complex trauma is very difficult to clinically diagnosis and effectively treat, often times frustrating the child's treatment plan and hindering progress to restoring the child to a state of normalcy, as generally accepted by society.

Traffickers employ a large amount of psychological manipulation as a means of power and control over their victim. As a result, the victims are made to believe that they consented to their own victimization, and in some instances, they believe that they themselves are the offenders. In this way, victims of trafficking will rarely seek help or report these cases to the proper authorities⁴.

Debatably, no one can consent to exploit themselves, and particularly no child under the age of 18. A person cannot fully understand the mental, emotional and physical abuse that they will endure while being exploited. The human brain is wired for intimacy. In every sexual act, the human brain needs an emotional attachment to the sexual partner, or at minimum, physical attraction to appropriately process the sexual encounter. Devoid of this attachment, engaging in a sex act, particularly a commercial sex act, cannot properly be interpreted by the brain. Therefore, the effects on the brain of commercial sex are equivalent to the effects of the worst forms of sexual abuse. However, at the time the victim consciously consents, their brain cannot subconsciously fathom the effects on the brain and body⁵.

Profile of the Offenders

As much as the profile of the victim defies all demographic classifications, so does the profile of the offender. Those willing to victimize other human beings for purposes of profit come in all forms. However, one commonality among the traffickers is their ability to identify and exploit certain vulnerabilities. It should also be noted, that as the age of the victims statistically falls, so does the age of the traffickers. There are several reasons for the decline in the average age of both categories. The summation of those reasons is the availability of information, predominately through the internet.

Traffickers can discover a wealth of knowledge through the internet. There are several websites like www.pimpfeet.com that educate readers on how to scout, manipulate, and trap human beings into a life of sexual servitude. Additionally, there are several books in print discussing the same principles as well as success stories of prolific pimps. These books, like "[Pimpology: 48 Rules of the Game](#)", can also be downloaded electronically onto a Kindle or other electronic device for easier reading and access.

³ Farley, Melissa. *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress*. Psychology Press, 2003.

⁴ United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report (2013), <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt>

⁵ Farley, Melissa. *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress*. Psychology Press, 2003.

Traffickers not only gain knowledge on how to be successful in their criminal endeavors, but they are also routinely exploiting social media to find their victims. Social media sites, like FaceBook, have become one of the primary methods of scouting used by the traffickers. Much in the same manner that the Government has methodically gathered intelligence to focus their efforts at making the mission more effective and efficient, the traffickers have now adopted a similar method of operation. There is an ever-expanding movement towards social media, and the young people in the United States are sharing their daily lives with world-wide web and any one taking the opportunity to 'follow' them. As almost every teenager has said to their parents at some point in their lives, "you just don't know what it is like to be a teenager today," traditionally those words were uttered within the walls of their own home. In today's society, those words are uttered on the 'walls' of a FaceBook page, where the traffickers are intently lying in wait and listening for the opportunity to offer false promises of 'understanding,' 'identity' and 'love.' Ideologies that are paramount to any human being, especially a developing adolescent.

Traffickers also use services like Greyhound Bus services to move victims from one location to another, not only because it is a cost effective method of transportation, but the traffickers know that proper identification is not required to purchase or obtain a bus ticket. Therefore, this allows traffickers to transport minors using aliases through these bus services and leaving little to no trail for law enforcement to track their movements and recover the juveniles being exploited.

Noteworthy Investigations

The aforementioned conclusions are drawn from countless interviews, investigations, and prosecutions relating to human trafficking in northern Virginia. Those investigations centralized in Virginia have, however, touched locations outside of Virginia like Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Indiana, Nevada, California, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Illinois. Sex trafficking investigations are some of the most complex investigations that law enforcement is tasked with addressing. The complexity of these investigations is a result of the difficulty in addressing the needs of the victims, following the electronic and money trails, and the overall scope of the cases.

As previously stated, the victimization of those trafficked is extremely complex. A victim has several needs ranging from basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, to the more intricate needs of crisis management and therapeutic treatment. The approach to these investigations calls for a necessary shift in law enforcement's traditional approach to criminal investigations. The new 'norm' is a victim-centered approach, where the needs of the victim and stabilization are the principle priority. This requires a unique understanding of the complex dynamics at-play by the investigator, the supervisors, and management within the law enforcement agencies. Apprehension and prosecution of the offenders is the secondary goal, whereas without a stable victim, a successful prosecution is almost impossible. To appropriately

address the needs of the victim it is essential to take on a multi-disciplinary collaborative approach to victim services. This process is often hindered by a lack of resources, appropriate services, funding, and the inability to share certain information.

Recalling, the predominance of traffickers online scouting new victims, traffickers have also turned to the internet as a means of advertising. Traffickers are plainly advertising their illegal services on internet sites like Backpage.com, a site which maintains a legitimate and legal function as a location to post online classifieds. Additionally, what is mostly a 'cash business' is using prepaid debit cards from companies like GreenDot and Vanilla Visa as a means of moving monies anonymously and without accountability. Illegal monies earned through commercial sex can be placed on these debit cards that require no verification of identity. The cards can then be used to purchase hotels, transportation, cell phones, condoms, and other items that travel in interstate commerce to further their trafficking enterprise. The difficulties in tracking persons engaged in illegal activities has become increasingly more complicated. Additionally, certain companies operating within the United States have stalled law enforcement investigations into the commercial sexual exploitation of children due to a lack of responsiveness to court-ordered legal process requesting information or claims that the company retains no electronic records of information transmitted or received through these services offered over the internet.

One of the most misunderstood complexities of these investigations is the scope of the case. When referring to the 'scope' there are two areas which are most notable: amount of records to compile and track and the number of victims involved in the case. Between hotel records, electronic records, cellular records, financial records, and information received from social media sites, the amount of data to be compiled, reviewed, and analyzed is overwhelming and greater than most investigations native to law enforcement in the United States. Secondly, the number of victims identified through the course of these investigations far exceeds the number of victims in more common investigations. Given that the complex trauma experienced by these victims is real, their needs much greater than most victims, and the number of victims identified in each case unprecedented, these investigations would call for a team of trained and experienced investigators working collectively to appropriately and effectively address each of these investigations.

Since 2011, the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia through the Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force has successfully prosecuted over 42 defendants for trafficking related conduct in northern Virginia. Of those cases prosecuted, over 50 juvenile victims of sex trafficking and more than 300 adult victims have been identified. The US Attorney's Office has aggressively prosecuted pimps and gangs alike for this conduct.

One of the most notable cases was that of the *Underground Gangster Crips*, a case in which a group of Crips gang members were trafficking juvenile and adult females throughout northern Virginia for more than six years. This criminal street gang was recruiting young girls from FaceBook as well as public locations like bus stops, metro rail stations, and malls. The gang exploited the concept of 'family' and targeted young girls who were having issues at home or other areas of their personal lives. They would offer them an identity, a sense of belonging,

and understanding in a time when their lives were otherwise tumultuous and uncertain. Initially very sympathetic and compassionate to the intended victims, once the exploitation began they would trap them with illegal narcotics and maintain power and control through the use of physical and sexual assaults. The investigation revealed that Justin Strom, the leader of the Underground Gangster Crips, and his co-conspirators attempted to recruit over one thousand young girls from the northern Virginia area. These girls were exploited in northern Virginia neighborhoods and were advertised on the street or online through Backpage.com. This group would routinely use prepaid debit cards to conceal and move the monies earned through their illegal operations.

In another investigation, it was revealed that a group alleging to be a rap group, *Black Italian Family*, recruited girls from multiple states and trafficked them into the northern Virginia area. This group used prepaid debit cards to pay for transportation, hotels, cellular telephones, condoms, and to move illegally obtained monies around undetected. The group would ply unsuspecting juveniles with molly and other illegal narcotics. One of the juveniles trafficked by the group made over \$8000 in one night engaging in commercial sex in northern Virginia, although none of that money was given back to the victims. These men were charged with running a Child Exploitation Enterprise in violation of 18 U.S.C. 2252A(g). This is one of the only times that this statute has ever been used to prosecute traffickers in the United States.

There have been multiple members of the violent transnational criminal street gang MS-13 who have been arrested and convicted of sex trafficking in the Eastern District of Virginia. These gang members, recruiting girls as young as 12 years old, would typically recruit them at parties, provide them with drugs and alcohol and threaten violence against them or their families if they did not comply with demands of the gang.

Among all of these notable cases, the victims never self-reported for fear of retaliation from their traffickers. Investigators have never been able to fully identify all persons that were victimized by these groups because of the lack of reporting and misidentification that exists among this population, and yet it is known that each of these groups victimized over twenty females each during the period in which their criminal enterprise was active. Additionally, the complexity of these cases and lack of resources to fully investigate them yields the unsettling reality that there are several more scenarios similar to these occurring right now throughout the United States.

Collaborative Efforts at Combating the Issue

The Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force was fortunate to have been awarded a grant by the United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crimes. The United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia leads the Task Force where the Fairfax County Police Department and Polaris Project partner together through the Enhanced Collaboration Model to combat the issues of human trafficking in northern Virginia. Being awarded this grant has afforded the opportunity for the Fairfax County Police Department to establish a full-time Human Trafficking Unit (HTU). This unit, currently

comprised of one investigator and one analyst, is responsible for tracking the instances of human trafficking throughout the region and investigating cases of trafficking within Fairfax County. Since its inception in October 2013, the HTU has received over 70 tips and leads relative to trafficking activities in the northern Virginia region. The HTU is actively investigating, as the lead agency or supporting other local or federal law enforcement with, 42 human trafficking cases. It is the consensus among human trafficking investigators, that one investigator can effectively handle two to three cases at one time. 52% of those cases involve juvenile sex trafficking cases where the victims range in age from 10 to 18 years old. In order to effectively address the issue and successfully dismantle and prosecute these trafficking enterprises, law enforcement, in conjunction with other service providers, has to have the opportunity to dedicate appropriate resources to handle the volume of cases that is present not just in northern Virginia, but throughout the United States. After law enforcement has been properly trained to identify trafficking, the next challenge is mustering the resources to investigate these very complex and resource-draining investigations. As previously mentioned, due to multiple factors, these cases quickly deplete the resources of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies responsible for investigating cases of trafficking. The Fairfax County Police Department is one of the few local law enforcement agencies in the United States that has a dedicated Human Trafficking Unit and even still the resources are limited.

One of the greatest needs with regards to the issue is the need for community awareness. It has recently been noted by several persons throughout the United States, that there is a lack of community awareness, and it is proven that awareness of the issue is the best method of prevention. In response to this need, the Fairfax County Police Department spearheaded a public awareness campaign in northern Virginia in collaboration with multiple agencies to include Fairfax County Office for Women and Domestic Violence, Juvenile Court Services Unit, Fairfax County Public Schools, Multicultural Clinical Center, and community advocates like the Fairfax Community Church and Hiddenbrook Communications. This campaign, rightly named the *Just Ask Campaign*, launched a website in January 2014, www.justaskva.org. The website, which is one of the only sites of its kind in the United States, is aimed at educating not only the community, but also attracting the teen population with innovative approaches like quizzes to help teens identify whether they may be being manipulated into a life of sexual servitude. The website, and campaign as a whole, seeks to educate teenagers, parents, and the community on the realities of sex trafficking. The website is complimented by a wristband campaign that is currently being promoted in the schools and community, where teens and adults alike are wearing blue colored wristbands with “Just Ask” imprinted on them to raise awareness of the issue and draw attention to the website. The working group is currently seeking to expand awareness through a poster campaign and production of other literature aimed at the general public, particularly the teen population, once funding can be secured.

In partnership with the Fairfax County Police Department, the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) have developed a curriculum for students beginning in the 6th grade and

continuing through the 12th grade where students will receive age-appropriate education and awareness training regarding teen sex trafficking. This comprehensive and robust curriculum is the first of its kind in the United States and necessary for all school-age children across the country as trafficking does not discriminate and is occurring in an increasing number of communities throughout the US. The curriculum was developed by Dr. Liz Payne and a one-hour long video presentation was created in conjunction with the curriculum. That video presentation and information is available online for anyone to view.⁶ The information, approach, and language used in the curriculum was developed in conjunction with the *Just Ask Prevention Project* to ensure universality of message.

There are several other prevention programs that work in collaboration with the Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force to identify and provide intervention to ‘at-risk’ youth. The Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force (NVRGTF), through the Gang Reduction Intervention Team (GRIT) Coordinators has identified various programs that are aimed at providing intervention not just for those at-risk for gang involvement, but also those who may be at risk for exploitation. The successful approaches to combating gang infestation in northern Virginia have proven to be an ideal and adaptable model to addressing the issues of human trafficking. Therefore, using the lessons learned from the NVRGTF and implementing similar programs will increase effective anti-trafficking practices. Additionally, the need for programs like the Arlington County Girl’s Outreach program is essential. A program that identifies at-risk girls and provides after-school supervision, mentoring, and counseling services teach girls appropriate decision-making and life skills aimed at preventing exploitation and victimization. This program, unique to Arlington County in its comprehensive approach has been proven to be effective and an invaluable augmentation of services for at-risk girls.

Prevention through education is the primary goal of the collaborative efforts to combat trafficking, but that does not completely eradicate trafficking and there becomes the necessity for intervention. Intervention, as previously discussed, presents two unique categories of problems. The first challenge is the prosecution of cases. In addition, to the complexities involved in addressing the needs of the victims and securing their testimony and cooperation for prosecution, there is the sweeping volume of evidence to compile. Some companies operating inside the United States delay responses to subpoenas or search warrants hinder law enforcement’s ability to react swiftly to recover children being exploited. Once the offenders are arrested and charged, there exists the frustration of punitive sentences consistently falling below the Federal Sentencing Guidelines. When defendants are recommended stiff penalties for their predatory and life-altering conduct, judges are imposing sentences well-below those recommendations. There is also the challenge in proving force, fraud, or coercion in instances where the victims are 18 years of age or older. In these cases, the traffickers refrain from physical force to avoid prosecution and use other forms of mental manipulation that are difficult to prove statutorily. The Mann Act (18 U.S.C. 2421-2423) criminalizes transportation of persons across state lines for the purposes of prostitution, however the Act currently has no provisions for mandatory

⁶ <http://www.fcps.edu/fairfaxnetwork/trafficking/index.html>

minimums when the victims are adults. This does not accurately reflect the level of victimization placed on those exploited by the traffickers.

The second challenge to intervention is providing appropriate therapeutic and other social services to the victims of this deplorable crime. Training among mental health professionals is lacking, and it is difficult to find residential treatment centers that are equipped to handle the complex trauma present with this victim population. In responding to this need, the Fairfax County Police Department in conjunction with the Multicultural Clinical Center and Prince William County (Virginia) Juvenile Court Services has developed and is in the initial phases of implementing a training program for residential treatment facilities in Virginia. This training will provide clinical workers with the foundational knowledge regarding commercial sexual exploitation and appropriate treatment modalities for victims. This program is unique in the certification that it offers from any other program in the United States, but its need reaches well beyond the borders of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Another area of concern that is often not addressed is the demand for commercial sex that fuels the traffickers' criminal enterprises. Individual states are enacting legislation to increase penalties for those that are paying for commercial sex, however the ability to prosecute these offenders who are taking advantage of human beings held in slavery does not exist on the federal level when those behaviors affect interstate commerce. By deterring those who are purchasing sex through stiff federal penalties would equally deter the instances of sex trafficking in the United States.

Through providing the necessary resources to allow law enforcement in collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, a collaborative approach will better educate, prevent, and intervene in trafficking scenarios in an effort to deter traffickers, reduce the number of victims, and restore the lives of those exploited. These resources include stiffer penalties for criminal behavior indicative of trafficking conduct, training for service providers to institute effective practices of treatment, and awareness and training through a national campaign to unveil the reality of trafficking in the diverse communities through the United States where traffickers prey on the young and vulnerable regardless of their background. I have witnessed first-hand the negative impact that trafficking has on the life of a young person, recalling the average life expectancy of a trafficking victim is only seven (7) years after the exploitation begins. However, I have also witnessed first-hand the restoration of a person and their basic human rights and dignity through proper response, treatment, and justice through meaningful prosecutions. I have witnessed first-hand that there is hope.

Statement by
Mrs. Cindy Hensley McCain
Co-Chair Arizona Governor's Task Force on Human
Trafficking
Before the
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
February 26, 2014

I'd like to thank Congressman Frank Wolf for inviting me to be here today and also thank all of you on this committee for bringing greater attention to human trafficking in the United States by holding this hearing. I am encouraged by the increased attention to human trafficking solutions that I am seeing in Arizona, across the nation and internationally. I am encouraged, but there is a great deal to be done and it's going to take all of us working together to raise awareness and fight to end this modern-day slavery.

I've been a life-long humanitarian and when I was introduced to human trafficking, I was sickened and immediately wanted to do all I could to help end it. I was traveling in India and was in a shop buying Sari material for my daughter. I heard clattering and clacking beneath the floorboards and looked down to see several sets of little eyes peering up at me. The shop owner told me they were his children and not to worry. Only later, did I realize I was likely looking at a group of trafficked children. I've been haunted by that scene and that I left without doing anything. I vowed to myself, I would do all I could going forward to help other victims of human trafficking.

The estimates on the numbers of trafficked persons are horrifying, but just as horrifying is each survivor's story and the realization that there were likely many people along their path that could have done something to help and didn't. It is all of our responsibility as citizens to pay attention and act when something is clearly wrong.

According to a 2011 FBI report on trafficking about 293,000 U.S. children are at risk of being exploited and trafficked for sex. The average age for a girl to be trafficked is 13. Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, Ambassador at Large of the State Department's office to Monitor and combat Trafficking in Persons recently estimated that 27 million men, women and children are victimized worldwide.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) estimates that 1 in 7 runaways reported to them in 2013 were likely sex trafficking victims. NCMEC also estimates that a pimp can make \$150,00-\$200,000 per child each year and the average pimp has 4-6 girls. It is a low risk and very high reward business. Drugs or weapons are sold once, human beings can be sold over and over again and many times in one day.

I am thrilled when there is progress such as in a recent FBI operation in July 2013 when 105 commercially sexually exploited children were recovered and 150 pimps and other involved in trafficking were arrested.

Over 1300 officers have been trained through NCMEC, and while that is a great start, there is a need for many more law enforcement officers specifically trained to handle trafficking.

Through my role as co-chair of Arizona's Task Force on Human Trafficking and with a partnership between The

McCain Institute for International Leadership and Polaris Project that seeks to strengthen anti-trafficking legislation in Arizona and the greater Mountain States, I'm witnessing firsthand just how important it is that we work with local, state, and national stakeholders to effectively combat human trafficking.

The task force heard recommendations from many who have been involved in the fight against human trafficking for years and presented 27 specific recommendations to our Governor. I am pleased to say that legislation is pending in the Arizona legislature that toughens the sentencing structure for traffickers, adds sex and labor trafficking to the list of acts that constitute racketeering, increases penalties if the victim is taken from foster care or a shelter situation and requires an escort service to include their license number in any ad as well as to keep on file proof of the age of anyone depicted in the ad. In addition, our recommendations regarding specific human trafficking training for first responders and changes to administrative practice to increase protection for these vulnerable victims are being implemented in my home state.

I've also been involved in working with Clear Channel and The Polaris Project to advertise the National Human Trafficking hotline number on 50 digital billboards throughout metropolitan Phoenix for all of 2014. Clear Channel has donated the billboards which flash the hotline number on 15 displays at a time and during any 4 week period in the campaign, 27 million people will see the hotline number. Our hope is that someone who needs help will be able to get it through this public awareness campaign.

In a recent study funded by the McCain Institute which will be released in early March 2014, we endeavored to explore

the impact of a large sporting event such as the Super Bowl using scientific research from Arizona State University and powerful analytics from Praescient Analytics.

Preliminary findings are disturbing. Through the analysis of online prostitution ads on Backpage.com in North New Jersey and local cities (Manhattan, Staten Island and Brooklyn), we found thousands of ads advertising sex. Of the ads that were searched, nearly 1000 ads (listing the ages of 18-20), 96.8% (954) for were for prostitution, of those, our analysts suspect that 83.7% (826) of them were being sex trafficked.

This was based on a new tool, a Sex Trafficking Matrix created by researchers in partnership with law enforcement experts, being developed to assist in the flagging of sex trafficked minors and adults in online ad venues.

In North Jersey and New York, 50 ads (5.1%) were flagged as potential trafficked minors. This percent may appear to be small but if you apply it across the thousands of ads posted each day in the US, this is a national tragedy.

Nearly 75% of the phone numbers used in the flagged minor sex ad were linked to another girl or woman indicating some sort of network or organization of trafficking.

The movement of girls for the Super Bowl was obvious as our research found that 20% of the ads had been placed in other cities before and/or after the Super Bowl.

- One ad was linked to ads prior to the Super Bowl week that went from 1) Boston, MA; 2) Worcester, MA; 3) North Jersey, NJ.; 4) South Jersey, NJ.; 5) Richmond, VA; and then to Manhattan, NY but on

Super Bowl Sunday was listed in an online sex ad in Boston, MA.

- Another ad was linked to prior ads in North Bay California (San Jose, San Francisco Bay area) and then to North Jersey during Super Bowl week and then back to Oakland/San Francisco, CA within a week after the Super Bowl.

Networks include gangs which have become increasingly a part of the sex trafficking of minors in the country as well as small organized sex trafficking groups. This research shows that sex trafficking as a part of a network was found in three quarters of these ads.

What we learned from this study so far includes:

1. The networks and circuits that facilitate the victimization of minors in sex trafficking are more pervasive than previously known. The average ad was linked to 3.5 other girls/women, one case had up to 11 girls/women linked by a criminal network.
2. These networks keep these victims on the move perhaps to avoid law enforcement detection but more likely, to find new customers. It is unlikely that they are avoiding law enforcement as there simply are not enough law enforcement eyes on this issue. How could any law enforcement unit in this country search thousands of ads, follow 50 potential leads, follow the networks and the dozens of phone numbers and photos associated.
3. We need to: create a national training for law enforcement specific to the complexities of sex trafficking; support the hiring and specialization of

new law enforcement units around the country and create a national tool that assists law enforcement in the tracking of traffickers and allows intelligence from one community to transfer to another and not be lost after the trafficker leaves the area.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. I applaud the work of this committee on human trafficking. It is a critical time and an opportunity for all of us to work together to give a voice to the voiceless.

TESTIMONY

of

JOHN D. RYAN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

for the

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED
AGENCIES**

“Countering Human Trafficking”

February 26, 2014

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the problem of child sex trafficking in the U.S. We are grateful for the Subcommittee's concern for this insidious threat to our nation's children.

In April of this year, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children ("NCMEC") will commemorate 30 years of operation. In those 30 years, we have answered almost 4 million calls, distributed more than 8 million missing child posters, and helped resolve more than 193,000 cases of missing children -- a resolution rate of 97.8%. This success is a testament to this Subcommittee's commitment to programs that help protect children. Your continued support will allow NCMEC to help thousands more children to come home or escape victimization.

As you know, NCMEC is a private, not-for-profit corporation, designated by Congress and working in partnership with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. NCMEC is a public-private partnership, funded in part by Congress and in part by the private sector. For almost 30 years, NCMEC has operated under Congressional authority to serve as the national resource center and clearinghouse on missing and exploited children, relying on an annual grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This statutory authorization (see 42 U.S.C. §5773) specifies 22 operational functions, including:

- operate a national 24-hour toll-free hotline, 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678), to intake reports of missing children and receive leads about ongoing cases;
- operate the CyberTipline, an online reporting mechanism that the public and electronic service providers may use to report Internet-related child sexual exploitation;
- provide technical assistance and training to individuals and law enforcement agencies in the prevention, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of cases involving missing and exploited children;
- track the incidence of attempted child abductions;
- provide forensic technical assistance to law enforcement;
- facilitate the deployment of the National Emergency Child Locator Center during periods of national disasters;

- work with law enforcement and the private sector to reduce the distribution of child pornography over the Internet;
- operate a child victim identification program to assist law enforcement in identifying victims of child pornography;
- develop and disseminate programs and information about Internet safety and the prevention of child abduction and sexual exploitation;
- provide technical assistance and training to law enforcement in identifying and locating non-compliant sex offenders;
- coordinate with child welfare agencies and law enforcement in the reporting of children missing from the foster care system;
- provide technical assistance to law enforcement in identifying, locating and recovering victims of child sex trafficking.

Our longest-running program to help prevent the sexual exploitation of children is the CyberTipline, the national clearinghouse for leads and tips regarding crimes against children on the Internet. It is operated in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”), the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations (“HSI”), the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the U.S. Secret Service, the Military Criminal Investigative Organizations, the Internet Crimes Against Children (“ICAC”) Task Forces, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, and other state and local law enforcement. We receive reports in eight categories of crimes against children:

- possession, manufacture and distribution of child pornography;
- online enticement of children for sexual acts;
- child sex trafficking;
- sex tourism involving children;
- extra familial child sexual molestation;
- unsolicited obscene material sent to a child;
- misleading domain names; and
- misleading words or digital images on the Internet.

These reports are made by both the public and by Electronic Service Providers (“ESPs”), who are required by law to report apparent child pornography to law enforcement via the CyberTipline (18 U.S.C. § 2258A). The leads are reviewed by NCMEC analysts, who examine and evaluate the content, use publicly-available resources to add related information, and provide the report to the appropriate law enforcement agency for possible investigation. These reports are triaged continuously to ensure that reports involving children in imminent danger get first priority.

The FBI, HSI , and U.S. Postal Inspection Service have direct and immediate access to all CyberTipline reports, and each agency assigns agents and analysts to work at NCMEC headquarters. In the 15 years since the CyberTipline began, NCMEC has received and processed more than 2.3 million reports. ESPs have reported to the CyberTipline more than 12 million images/videos of sexually exploited children. The analysts in our Child Victim Identification Program (“CVIP”) have reviewed more than 106 million child pornography images and videos. CVIP assists prosecutors by connecting seized images with the case agent who can identify the child depicted as an actual child, and helps law enforcement to locate and rescue child victims who have not yet been identified. Last week alone, CVIP analysts reviewed more than 387,000 images/videos.

When most Americans hear the term “child trafficking,” they think that it only happens somewhere else, such as Southeast Asia or Central America. Even if they acknowledge that trafficking happens in the United States, they assume the victims are foreign children brought into this country in order to be sold for sex in large cities.

In fact, we have learned that most of the victims of child sex trafficking in our country are American kids – most of whom initially leave home voluntarily as runaways and who end up being trafficked on Main Street, USA. One police officer described it this way: “the only way not to find this problem in any community is simply not to look for it.”

Child sex trafficking occurs every day in every community in the U.S. Mr. Chairman, you recall that Detective Bill Woolf of the Fairfax County, Virginia Police Department helped break up a trafficking ring in your district, in which teenage girls were recruited over social media networking sites and in the halls of their high schools for a life of sex trafficking.

Traffickers also actively target runaway children and then lure them into trafficking using psychological manipulation, illegal drugs and violence. Because of its clearinghouse role, NCMEC knows that many child sex trafficking victims are also missing children. One out of 7 of the endangered runaways reported to NCMEC in 2013 were likely sex trafficking victims. Not only has this number increased from the previous year, it has tripled since we started comparing missing children to trafficked children.

The reluctance of victims to self-identify and the challenges in law enforcement investigations make it very difficult to gauge the incidence of this type of crime. We will never obtain an exact count of child sex trafficking victims unless there is comprehensive, widely-available training on how to properly identify and respond to children who have been victimized through sex trafficking available to law enforcement, child welfare agencies, and medical professionals. This training must be mandated across all law enforcement units, especially for those officers investigating vice and gang-related crimes.

NCMEC believes training is a critical component that should be prioritized. Under a grant from the Justice Department, we recently created a curriculum for Child Sex Trafficking: Awareness & Response (“CSTAR”). The introduction to this course is currently available online to the multiple disciplines that are likely to come into contact with a child sex trafficking victim such as law enforcement, child welfare agencies, NGOs, victim service providers and medical professionals. Recently, the generosity of a private donor allowed us to present the comprehensive course to 43 federal and state law enforcement and prosecutors in Los Angeles. We hope to be able to make this extended course, which contains practical applications of investigation and interviewing techniques, a regular part of our law enforcement training program.

NCMEC’s grant allows us to partner with the Justice Department in its initiatives to combat child sex trafficking, both at the federal and state level.

One component of this partnership is NCMEC’s Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT), a specialized group of analysts which handles all law enforcement requests related to child sex trafficking. The CSTT provides comprehensive analytical services to law enforcement investigations, and links cases of possible child sex trafficking victims to missing child cases

known to NCMEC. Reports received by the CyberTipline regarding suspected child sex trafficking are referred to both the ICAC Task Forces and the FBI's Innocence Lost Task Forces. The ICAC Task Force Program is funded by OJJDP and engages in investigations, forensic examinations, and prosecutions related to technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children and Internet crimes against children. As the crime of child sex trafficking has expanded online, wherever possible the ICACs are a critical part of the response to this crime.

Our Child Sex Trafficking Team also supports the Innocence Lost National Initiative ("ILNI"), in partnership with the FBI and the Justice Department's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. Created in 2003, this initiative addresses the problem of child sex trafficking through the creation of local and regional task forces and working groups; targeted, coordinated sweeps including Operation Cross Country and the Super Bowl; and ongoing support for trafficking investigations. These 69 dedicated task forces and working groups have recovered more than 3,100 child victims, convicted more than 1,400 pimps and their associates – including 11 life sentences – and disrupted more than 570 criminal enterprises involving child sex trafficking. NCMEC's role in the initiative is to be a clearinghouse for reports involving suspected child sex trafficking; to provide analytical and technical assistance services to law enforcement investigating these cases; and to dedicate case management support for missing children victimized through sex trafficking.

During Operation Cross Country and other targeted sweeps, the CSTT provides 24/7 analytical support and technical assistance. Using donated public records databases and cross-referencing our Missing Children and CyberTipline databases, we provide information on potential child victims, and suspected pimps and their associates, to the Innocence Lost Task Forces through the FBI agents assigned to work at our headquarters.

In August of 2013, during Operation Cross Country VII, CSTT analysts assisted officers in more than 230 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, which led to the rescue of 105 children and the arrest of 150 pimps who are accused of exploiting them. Compared to the Operation in 2012, this was a 32% increase in the number of children recovered and a 43% increase in the number of pimps arrested. Many children rescued during the seven Operations conducted to date had been reported to NCMEC as missing children.

The youngest child rescued in the 2013 Operation was 13 years old.

NCMEC's Critical and Runaway Unit comprises specialized case management teams to handle cases in which the missing child is also a possible child sex trafficking victim. They coordinate the creation and dissemination of posters to generate tips and leads, all of which are sent to the investigating law enforcement agency. NCMEC works closely with approximately 300 corporate photo partners who disseminate photos of missing children to millions of homes across the U.S. every day.

To assist law enforcement during their trafficking investigations, children who are entered into our system are flagged upon intake, increasing the likelihood that they will be treated as victims and not as criminals. This will also trigger the deployment of NCMEC's numerous resources which includes specialized case management services, technical assistance, analytical support, recovery planning, and victim services support. These resources are available at no cost and are used by law enforcement to support their efforts in bringing these children home.

Thanks to our role as the nation's clearinghouse NCMEC is continually expanding our priorities to respond to the evolving threats to children. Because we know children in the foster care system are being targeted by traffickers, NCMEC has streamlined our resources to provide more specialized services to social services and law enforcement with these cases. Of the children reported missing to NCMEC in 2013 who are likely child sex trafficking victims, 67% were in the care of social services or foster care when they ran.

We are encouraged by Congressional action on this issue. Not only did this Congress pass the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, it is currently working on several bills to address critical aspects of this problem, including identifying victims, reporting missing foster children to law enforcement, and prosecuting the customers. When enacted, these bills will greatly assist the work of NCMEC and other programs in the Justice Department.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the National Center sees the potential for real progress in addressing child sex trafficking in the U.S., thanks in large part to your leadership and continued support. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee.