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GENERAL ASSEMBLY



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**Testimony of
Leslie J. Gabel-Brett, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Judiciary Committee
Friday, February 24, 2006**

Re:

**R.B 153, AAC the Interagency Task Force on Trafficking in Persons
R.B 154 AA Implementing the Recommendations of the Interagency Task Force on
Trafficking in Persons**

Good afternoon Sen. McDonald, Rep. Lawlor, and members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Gabel-Brett and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of S.B 153, AAC the Interagency Task Force on Trafficking in Persons, and S.B 154, AA Implementing the Recommendations of the Interagency Task Force on Trafficking in Persons.

For the past two years, the PCSW has had the privilege of serving on an interagency task force chaired by Sen. Stillman to study the incidence and consequences of human trafficking in Connecticut. We thank Sen. Stillman for her leadership on this important issue. We are attaching to this testimony a copy of the Final Report of the Task Force that includes information and recommendations.

We have all learned a great deal over the course of the past two years, and what we have learned is painful and ugly. Human trafficking is defined as

... all acts involved in the recruitment, abduction, transport, harboring, transfer, sale or receipt of persons, within national or across international borders, through force, coercion, fraud or deception, to place persons in

situations of slavery or slavery-like conditions, forced labor or services, such as forced prostitution or sexual services, domestic servitude, bonded sweatshop labor or other debt bondage.¹

In plain language, human trafficking means kidnapping or fraudulently bringing human beings into this country or this state, usually for the purpose of prostitution or forced labor. According to the 2005 Trafficking in Persons Report produced by the U.S. Department of State, between 600,000 and 800,000 men, women and children are trafficked across international borders each year.² Of that number, it is estimated that 80% of the victims are female and up to 50% are children.³ Hundreds of thousands of these women and children are used in forced prostitution each year.⁴ Approximately 14,500 – 17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. each year.⁵ Since January 2001, the Department of Justice has opened over 400 investigations and prosecuted 215 traffickers.⁶

When we started our investigation of this issue, many of us – including law enforcement officials – believed or wished to believe it was not a problem in Connecticut. Unfortunately, we learned that victims of trafficking are here in our state. You may have seen the news coverage about Micheline Slattery who in 1994 was trafficked from Haiti to Connecticut for \$2,500. Micheline spent the next four years enslaved in a Connecticut home enduring verbal and physical abuse and endless housework. She eventually escaped and now lives in Massachusetts. Or you may have read the news story about the 22-year-old woman who was smuggled into this state from Guatemala and then held as a domestic and sexual slave in Greenwich by a man who allegedly paid \$5,000 for her. Only a month ago, the U.S. Attorney's office brought charges against a man who owned several Dunkin Donuts stores on the shoreline who was allegedly smuggling workers from Portugal. The workers were allegedly lured here by fraudulent promises of good jobs, then required to work as many as 85 hours per week including performing tasks at the owner's home such as gardening and snow removal for approximately \$250 per week. We also heard stories about small, inconspicuous brothels in ordinary houses or apartments in local communities where vans from New York City brought women for a few nights then drove them away.

Human trafficking is serious business. International traffickers are ordinarily part of large, organized crime syndicates who choose to traffic in persons, rather than drugs or weapons, because it is a high-profit, low-risk business. Our federal government has recognized the severity of this criminal activity and enacted the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. Under this federal law, victims of trafficking who cooperate with

¹ S.A. 04-8, An Act Establishing an Interagency Task Force on Trafficking in Persons

² U.S. Department of State. *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Publication 11252, June 2005, p. 6.

³ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ U.S. Department of State. *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2004.

⁶ Department of Justice. "Garment Factory Owner Sentenced to 40 Years For Human Trafficking," 6.23.05

federal prosecutors are eligible for victim services and a special T-Visa that allows them to remain in this country.

We face several challenges in Connecticut:

- First, we must learn to identify victims of trafficking and respond to them as victims of a crime, rather than as criminals. In particular, women and children who are brought and held here for prostitution must not be incarcerated or prosecuted. Police and other law enforcement professionals must be trained to recognize the signs of trafficking and to use translators, social workers, domestic violence and sexual assault professionals to assist them in communicating with victims and protecting them from further harm.
- Second, we must coordinate local, state and federal law enforcement efforts, and collect data so we can analyze trends and make best use of our resources.
- Third, we must develop and fund services to keep victims safe and to help them return to their home country, if they wish, or successfully integrate into this country. This will require funding and strengthening services provided by experts in violence against women and children.

The bills under consideration, R.B.153 and R.B.154, reflect several of the key recommendations made by the Task Force in its final report and therefore represent a consensus among state law enforcement officials, key state agencies, and community advocates and services providers.

R.B. 154 includes the following:

- Establishes a specific crime of trafficking in persons, make such crime a Class B felony and one of the predicate offenses under the Corrupt Organizations and Racketeering Act (CORA);
- Creates enhanced penalties under the labor statutes for labor law violations that involve trafficking;
- Creates a civil right of action by the trafficking victim against the person guilty of trafficking;
- Creates an affirmative defense for the victim of forced prostitution to the crime of prostitution;
- Requires the Office of Victims Services, in conjunction with community providers, to provide emergency, high security protection to trafficking victims, and creates a special funding account for that purpose and allocates \$100,000 to a victims security fund administered by the Judicial Department for this purpose;

- Requires the Police Officer Standards and Training Council and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to develop a training program for state and local police departments and community organizations, available upon request, and appropriates \$75,000 for that purpose.

R.B. 153 expands and continues the Interagency Task Force on Trafficking in order to focus further on victim services and data analysis.

We have made a great deal of progress in Connecticut in learning about and addressing trafficking. Legislators, law enforcement personnel, community advocates and service providers have joined together to make sure that our laws are strong and that services are available to assist victims of this crime. The bills before you are important steps forward in this process because the work is not yet done. We urge your support.
Thank you