

**Connecticut State Legislative Session 2010**  
**Testimony to the Select Committee on Children**  
**Public Hearing Re: S.B. 153-An Act Providing a Safe Harbor for Exploited Children**  
**Submitted by Daniela Giordano**

Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Urban, members of the Children's Committee. I particularly would like to note that Senator Ed Meyer is the senator of my hometown of Branford.

My name is Daniela Giordano and I am currently a Graduate student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, majoring in policy practice. I am here to testify to support S.B. 153 with revisions to stop persecuting victims of child sexual exploitation as criminals and connecting these young people to crucial services.

My concern is for children in Connecticut under the age of seventeen who, at this point in time, enter the juvenile justice system as perpetrators of prostitution instead of being considered victims of sex trafficking when having engaged in sexual acts for money.

This practice seems at odds with Connecticut state law that asserts that until a person reaches age sixteen she or he is legally incapable of consenting to sex with someone over the age of eighteen, which most buyers of commercial sex are.

The way the law is currently written is blaming the victims who are sexually exploited by both traffickers and the adults buying sex with minors. Children get re-traumatized when being arrested and tried in court, reducing their chances to have productive lives of opportunities when being given a criminal record. 80-90% of child trafficking victims have been sexually abused.

S.B. 153 is a good start to look at how we approach and treat victims of child sexual exploitation. It would eliminate the perception and the voice that claims that minors can consent to commercial sexual acts and therefore are at fault for being exploited in this way. The exploitation usually is perpetrated by much older men who may pose as boyfriends, care takers or protectors, and later add to these roles isolation from family and friends, threats of and acts of violence to continue to coerce young people to engage in

prostitution. According to the Polaris Project Action Center, a leading non-profit organization combating human trafficking, a bill similar to S.B. 153 was passed in New York in 2008.

Revising S.B. 153 to stop the prosecution of young people under the age of seventeen in the first place would be more in line with what Safe Harbor bills are intended to accomplish. The new Safe Harbor bill could then pave the way for identifying these victims of sex trafficking which would include the training of members of law enforcement in being able to do just that. Victims of human trafficking could then be connected to existing crucial services including counseling, medical care, and other social services like safe housing needed to reclaim their young lives. Their chances of being productive citizens of our state would be abundantly increased.

I urge you to revise S.B. 153 to stop prosecuting victims of child sex trafficking as criminals and connecting them to services, knowing that you are standing up for the children of Connecticut and offering them a way to regain their strength, dignity and the hope for a better future where they have real choices about their lives that are not determined by someone else's agenda but their own actions.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my views with you and would be happy to try to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted, Daniela Giordano