



Testimony in support of S.B. 153
"Safe Harbor" for sexually exploited minors

February 23, 2010

Select Committee on Children
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Musto, Representative Urban and the Select Committee on Children,

I began my career working specifically with victims of commercial sexual exploitation back in 1979 after meeting an eighteen year old girl named Lisa M. who had been groomed by a man she thought was her boyfriend into the world of drugs and prostitution.

Alone and ashamed, she did not feel she could turn to her family for support. After meeting Lisa by chance at a diner during a snowstorm, my wife, Audrey, and I began working with her to understand how an honors student from a good family in Connecticut could fall prey to commercial sexual exploitation.

After months of counseling and drug-addiction therapy from a licensed clinician, Lisa was making significant progress and planned to start college. But before she could successfully escape the massage parlor that exploited her, she was found dead with two men in New Haven.

In her honor, Audrey and I helped form a non-profit organization to combat the exploitation of women and children. Currently, I am the President of the Barnaba Institute, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization whose mission is to raise awareness about human trafficking as it pertains to sexual exploitation through education and media; to provide professional training courses on how to identify human trafficking victims and to provide support, guidance and care to at-risk, sexually exploited and trafficked youth and adults.

Throughout my career in this field, I have assisted youth and women trapped in commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. I have been involved in cases where law enforcement treated the minor as a criminal and cases where law enforcement treated the minor as a victim. The latter worked the best and enabled the victim to be treated as a human being where she was referred to appropriate social services.

I strongly support S.B. 153 which will establish a presumption in prosecution of a person under the age of seventeen for prostitution that such person was a victim of the crime of trafficking in persons. As the bill is currently written, I feel that minor changes would greatly strength its effectiveness. These suggestions include:

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www.barnabainstitute.org

The Barnaba Institute is a registered 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization. Your contribution is tax deductible as provided by law.