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SB
153

Paul & Lisa Statement for: Safe Harbor for Trafficked Children

My Name is Denise Holloman, I am representing the Paul and Lisa Program, Inc. located in Essex, CT. Our organization has been the leading organization in Connecticut for 30 years working with commercially sexually exploited women and children. I have been fortunate to have run the Women's Holistic Health Education Program (an alternative to incarceration for women arrested for prostitution) in Hartford and Waterbury Community Court five of the nine years since its implementation back in 1999.

Statistics from our assessment process have shown that, 95 percent of the women we have worked with have been sexually abused as children and grow up to perpetuate the abuse by being coerced by pimps or their boyfriends into the life of prostitution. Most of them began prostituting in their teens as a means to secure a relationship only to be victimized again by the one they love. As they become older, selling their bodies assists in supporting their drug addiction. Because of their past frame of reference, these women look for love and acceptance in all the wrong places.

Over the course of the years I have worked with a number of participants who have started prostituting in their teens. Because there were no laws on the books at that time to help this young teen, she suffered from mental health issues, unsafe housing, abuse and trauma from her lifestyle that continued into adulthood. She could have benefited as well as many of the women I have had the pleasure of working with.

Our agency strongly supports the **Safe Harbor for Trafficked Children** bill. These children need to be protected and referred to the comprehensive services necessary to reframe their thinking so they can have a chance to become productive members of the community. If this bill was in effect when some of the women were children and were arrested came through our program, perhaps the victimization would have stopped sooner.

Now I'd like to read a personal testimony from the former Executive Director of The Paul and Lisa Program, Shaleen Silva.