



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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State Victim Advocate

Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate  
Select Committee on Children  
Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Urban and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Children. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

**Raised Senate Bill No. 153, An Act Providing a Safe Harbor for Exploited Children**

Connecticut is uniquely placed as it is a throughway between New York and Boston and has the potential to become a breeding ground for human traffickers. As individual states adopt new legislation to combat human trafficking, Connecticut must remain vigilant so that we not only address the human trafficking problem in our state, but also deter human traffickers from moving into our state to begin with.

The majority of victims in human trafficking cases are woman and young girls. It is important to first identify victims as victims, and further, work closely with trafficking victims—many of whom don't speak English—to procure their help in prosecuting their captors. Additionally, there must be support and services in place to ensure that trafficking victims are able to cope with the horrors they've been through and get back on their feet.

Raised Senate Bill No. 153 is a reasonable step to a growing national problem. Those individuals who are identified as victims, through the investigation, should be treated as victims and not as defendants. To subject a trafficking victim to an arrest and prosecution only compounds the harm and trauma experienced by the victim. We believe through investigation law enforcement should be able to identify those individuals who are truly trafficking victims and not seek prosecution. However, the proposed affirmative defense should be available for those individuals who were not identified initially through the initial investigation as trafficking victims, as is often the case.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony. I urge the committee to support the proposal.

Very Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Michelle S. Cruz'.

Michelle Cruz, Esq.  
State Victim Advocate