

Good Afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Urban, Representative Fawcett and members of the Select Committee on Children:

My name is Nicole von Oy. I am from Love46, a non-profit organization here in CT that combats child sex slavery & exploitation. I am here in support of S.B. 1044 "AN ACT REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO CONDUCT ABUSE OR NEGLECT INVESTIGATIONS OF YOUTHS ARRESTED FOR PROSTITUTION." I want to thank you for calling this hearing on such an important issue.

Although it is difficult to accurately depict the numbers of children trafficked with certainty, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children estimates that at least 100,000 American children each year are the victims of commercial sexual exploitation and child trafficking. The average age of entry is 12-14 years old. These children are commodities for sale. They are trafficked, moved from city to city for the financial gain of those who use, abuse and control them. These children are victims of modern day slavery. They lack the ability to walk away. These children need to be rescued and restored.

I wear a few hats at Love46. One is to train adults working with youth, service providers and agencies looking for more information on the issue. I have trained many adults as well as a group of law enforcement late last year. One of my other roles within Love46 is working with adolescent girls and boys in different settings, i.e. group homes, residential facilities, communities and schools. Specifically, one curriculum we utilize is called My Life, My Choice. With this curricula, I work with adolescent girls in group homes and residential facilities educating them and giving them tools to keep themselves safe out in the community and recognize signs of sexual exploitation of children.

In a few of the homes I facilitated in, I came across girls who were willing to share their stories with me who at one point were involved in prostitution/human trafficking because they were looking for someone to love them; they were lured, coerced, or forced into it or put into it by their parents. These girls didn't want to be involved, as much as people may have thought they did.

For the past three years, DCF has been very diligent and very responsive to the issue of sexual exploitation of children. They have developed protocols to work with victims and have developed trainings to educate their social workers on the issue. In most part, because of DCF's trainings, at least 52 victims have been identified here in CT (Personal Communication, William Rivera, DCF). This is just brushing the surface. There are many more out there in need of services and need to be given the help they deserve to live a meaningful and productive life.

It is important to ensure that law enforcement begin to make these referrals so services can be provided. It is important that law enforcement make DCF their first point of so they can immediately investigate a case of a child who has been arrested for prostitution and more rapidly provide them with services that they need to begin the restoration process.

Thank you.