

Center for Children's Advocacy

TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5040 SECTIONS 3, 4, 5 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Committee on Children
February 18, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, Senator Linares, Representative Betts, and distinguished Members of the Committee on Children. This testimony is presented on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization whose mission is to advocate for the most vulnerable children of Connecticut and ensure their access to justice. We support Raised Bill No. 5040, sections 3, 4, and 5, relating to child victims of human trafficking for the following reasons.

The federal government estimates that 200,000 American children are trafficked each year.¹ Trafficking children for commercial sex and labor has become a rapidly growing criminal enterprise in the country, generating an estimated \$32 billion dollars a year.² Connecticut has had 195 reported cases of child sex trafficking over the last six years.³ This past summer, five teenage girls who were being sexually exploited were rescued in a Connecticut hotel during an FBI raid. These girls were among more than 100 sexually exploited minors who were rescued across the nation over one weekend.⁴ Nevertheless, these numbers are likely underrepresented, as they only account for those children *who have been identified*.

Every day, children are being exploited for commercial sex across our state and they are in need of a safe harbor. Children are special targets for human trafficking because they are vulnerable and easy to convince. Many of them do not even become aware that they are victims until they have long become the property of their traffickers.

The Department of Children and Families has proposed sections 3-5 of this bill in order to provide the agency with the legal authority to seek legal custody of child victims of human trafficking. The Bill's most important objectives are:

1. To provide child victims of human trafficking with child welfare services and address their needs as victims.

This objective recognizes that these children require specialized services to treat the unique trauma they have endured.

¹ U.S. Department of Justice. 2004. *Report to Congress from Attorney General John Ashcroft on U.S. Government Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons in Fiscal Year 2003*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

² Facsheet on Human Trafficking, UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME, *available at* http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/UNVTF_fs_HT_EN.pdf.

³ *Connecticut Forum Planned on Trafficking of Minors*, THE BULLETIN (Jan 29, 2014), *available at* <http://www.norwichbulletin.com/article/20140129/NEWS/140129435/0/SEARCH>.

⁴ *Local Children Rescued During FBI Sex Trafficking Raids*, NBC CONNECTICUT (Jul. 29, 2013), *available at* <http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/5-Children-Rescued-During-Local-Child-Sex-Trafficking-Raids-217403301.html>.

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2. To provide training to law enforcement and raise awareness among the general public.

To address the problem from a preventive standpoint, DCF may provide training to law enforcement officials likely to encounter minor children who are victims of trafficking and educate the general public on the issue. This is in order to identify the victims, recognize children at risk and prevent the problem from reoccurring. We know that increased training has led to increased identification of victims.

3. To establish multidisciplinary teams to advance and coordinate the prompt investigation of suspected cases involving child trafficking.

4. To include children who have been victims of human trafficking into the definition of “uncared for” under state law.

This would extend to these children the protection given to abused and neglected children under our state’s laws.

Sections 3, 4, and 5 of this bill are an important step in furthering protection to a class of children who are especially vulnerable because they have fallen prey to a brutal form of child abuse. We ask this Committee to support these provisions.

Respectfully Submitted,

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