



TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE MARCH 14, 2016

HB NO. 5621 AN ACT CONCERNING HUMAN TRAFFICKING
HB NO. 5623 AN ACT CONCERNING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND VICTIMS
OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee: My name is Mallory LaPierre; I am the policy associate of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We believe in prevention to keep children from entering the system and best practice and policy to ensure that children who do enter the system are treated safely, fairly, and effectively, so that they can succeed.

We strongly support HB 5621 and HB 5623, namely the provisions that would raise the age a child can be charged with prostitution from sixteen to eighteen years old. The intent of these bills is to recognize that children engaged in prostitution are victims of sexual exploitation and not criminals.

The majority of U.S. children involved in prostitution are runaways and are past victims of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and/or other forms of trauma.¹ These youth are manipulated by adults to engage in sexual acts in return for a fee and are coerced into continued prostitution by sophisticated psychological, emotional, and physical means.² These children need to be connected to services and treatment rather than be punished.

Furthermore, a seventeen-year-old Connecticut youth cannot vote, serve on a jury, get a marriage license on his or her own, or enter a casino. Connecticut's Raise the Age law acknowledged that children under the age of eighteen should be treated as juveniles and not adults. Moreover, the Department of Children and Families, the social service provider for those children involved in prostitution, states that youth can receive services from its agency until age eighteen.³ Raising the age for which a child can be charged with prostitution would be more consistent with Connecticut's current laws.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony, which relies heavily on information and thinking from our colleagues at Connecticut Voices for Children.

Alliance member organizations:

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice / CHDI, Children's Mental Health Connecticut, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, LifeBridge, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children

¹ Urbina, Ian. *For Runaways on the Street, Sex Buys Survival*. New York Times, Oct. 27, 2009. Section A, pg. 1.

² Kate Brittle, "Child Abuse by Another Name: Why the Child Welfare System is the Best Mechanism in Place to Address the Problem of Juvenile Prostitution," *Hofstra Law Review* (2008), 6, 7.

³ Connecticut General Statutes Section 17a-93. Available at: <http://cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap319a.htm>