

Center for Youth Leadership
Brien McMahon High School
Mayor's Youth Leadership Council
Stamford High School

Why wait for someone else to make a difference?

Judiciary Committee:
Testimony in Support of HB 7399: An Act Concerning Legal Protections for the
Victims of Human Trafficking & the Protection of Minors from Cyber Exploitation

We are submitting this to Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and members of the Judiciary Committee. On behalf of the 180 members of the Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon High School and the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council at Stamford High School, we are writing in support of HB 7399, An Act Concerning Victims of Human Trafficking.

Human trafficking is one of several social issues addressed by our members. The public awareness campaigns we design and lead educate our peers and the general public about trafficking in the United States. We have testified before the Trafficking in Persons Council and the Judiciary Committee, especially where nail salons are concerned, but our interest extends to child victims of this horrendous trauma. In fact, we were among scores of advocates to testify in support of legislation that was enacted as Public Act 16-71.

HB 7399 addresses an important gap in Connecticut's ability to provide effective services to survivors of human trafficking. Currently in Connecticut, a victim's communications with a human trafficking counselor is not confidential. Therapeutic care depends on victims having confidence and trust that they can make honest and complete disclosures about the facts, memories, thoughts, and feelings associated with their victimization. They must be able to confide in counselors without risk that the information they share could be disclosed publicly without their consent. This bill will enable children who have been trafficked to speak openly to trained service providers confidentially. It will also offer additional protection to those children who committed crimes as a direct result of their trafficking and expand the definition of commercial sexual abuse to include online exploitation.

Human trafficking is an awful crime. Victims deserve protection and privacy. Survivors should have the right to decide when, what, and to whom their information is shared, and should not fear disclosure in court. HB 7399 will facilitate victims' access to services and protect children who have fallen prey to pimps and others. We will close with a quote from Harvey Washington, a pimp in New York City. This is what he said about luring people our age into a life of slavery: "*Promise them heaven and they'll follow you to hell.*" Let's help end the hell experienced by way too many children. We ask the Committee to join us in supporting HB 7399. Thank you.

Sincerely: Natalie Ochoa, Frida Avila, Valeria Chavez, Molly Tiplady, and Casey Van

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