

Testimony of The Village for Families & Children
In support of HB 7399 - An Act Concerning Legal Protections For The Victims of Human
Trafficking And The Protection of Minors From Cyber Exploitation
Yvette Young, LPC
Project Director/ Human Anti-trafficking Response Team Coordinator
Judiciary Committee, April 1, 2019

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Yvette Young and I have the privilege of working as the Human Anti-trafficking Response Team Coordinator through The Village for Families & Children in partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Village for Families & Children is a 200- year-old nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children, youth and adults in Connecticut. In 2014, The Village was selected by DCF to partner with them in their Human Trafficking efforts. In my role as the HART Coordinator, I work closely with key stakeholders who are invested in the eradication of human trafficking in our state as well as providing services and support to victims of this crime. HART is focused on developing a comprehensive system in CT that focuses on prevention, identification, rescue of victims, prosecution and recovery support. Based on our work with minor victims of human trafficking, I support HB 7399 – An Act Concerning Legal Protections for the victims of Human Trafficking and the Protection of Minors from Cyber Exploitation, because I believe our children who are being trafficked deserve to be protected.

I am in support of confidential communication between an anti- trafficking counselor and a victim of child trafficking because confidential communication is essential in fostering a safe space for survivors to feel comfortable disclosing the abuse they have experienced. Many victims of human trafficking are apprehensive in disclosing their abuse due to fear of their exploiter as well as fear of the system. They often believe that they will be punished for their actions despite the fact that they were victimized. It is important to extend confidential communication to anti-trafficking counselors so that child trafficking victims can have a voice. Without the assurance that their disclosures will be kept confidential, victims will be rendered voiceless and left to deal with the psychological and physical pain they have endured as a result of being trafficked. Not having a safe place or person to speak to about their abuse without fear of their information being shared with others, can result in further victimization.

Human Trafficking victims have existed beneath the radar for many years. Now that there is greater focus on this crime and the victims it has created our laws need to be enhanced to include them as well. Passage of HB 7399 is critical, because victims of human trafficking deserve the same protections as sexual assault and domestic violence survivors. Your support of this bill will send a message to trafficking survivors that they too deserve the opportunity to have their conversation with a child anti- trafficking counselor be considered privileged communication; allowing them to speak freely and to begin their journey towards healing. Therefore, I urge the committee to support **HB 7399**.

Section 10a of this bill defines commercial sexual exploitation of a minor as an exchange of sex for a fee. I am appealing to this committee to change that language from “fee” to “anything of value”.

Changing the language from “fee” to “anything of value” is important because often our youth are being sold or exchanging sex, not only for a fee, but for other items. In many cases, sex is being exchanged for drugs, a place to stay, food, clothing, electronics, transportation, etc. If money is not being exchanged that does not change the victimization. **The fact is our children are being sold and bought.** We need a law that states that it is trafficking if there is an exchange of sex for anything of value.

Our responsibility as adults is to protect our children. Protection can come in many forms. In this case protection is giving them a confidential space to share their abuse so they can begin to heal. Protection is letting our children know that if any one sexually exploits them by offering not only a fee but anything of value, that those individuals will be held accountable for their actions. Protection means elevating the needs of our children above those of their exploiters. Show our children that you are invested in protecting them by supporting HB7399. Thank You for your time and attention.