



Strengthening Our Commitment to Victims of Youth Trafficking

THE PROBLEM:

Each year, an estimated 300,000 youth may become victims of sex trafficking, while other youth are forced into hard labor and drug trafficking. Runaway and homeless youth are especially at risk of falling victim to sex trafficking. Approximately one out of six runaway youth reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) were likely victims of sex trafficking. Additionally, roughly one out of three youth are lured into prostitution within 48 hours of running away from home. While these numbers are staggering, the problem may be worse, due to a lack of coordinated information gathering and sharing across private organizations and federal, state, and local agencies.

Unfortunately, outdated child welfare policies are exacerbating this national crisis. It is estimated that 68 percent of likely sex trafficking victims reported to NCMEC were at one time involved in the child welfare system. Researchers at Loyola University Chicago examined the role of child protective services workers in a number of cities. The researchers found that these workers were not properly trained to handle cases involving youth trafficking. As a result, victims are slipping through the cracks of child welfare systems.

THE SOLUTION:

More must be done to identify, assess, and help children at risk of becoming victims of trafficking, such as:

- Improving the ability of child welfare workers to identify and assess child victims of trafficking – including runaway and homeless youth – and the services they need;
- Engaging in a coordinated effort at the federal, state, and local levels to collect and share information that will help analyze and identify youth trafficking; and
- Identifying state efforts that successfully serve youth trafficking victims in order to spread best practices to other states.

These are commonsense solutions to better identify and serve victims of youth trafficking. To strengthen our commitment to these vulnerable youth, members of the House of Representatives have introduced bipartisan legislation that will improve the child welfare response to trafficking and enhance support services for victims.

Strengthening the Child Welfare Response to Trafficking Act of 2015:

Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA), along with House Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN) introduced the *Strengthening the Child Welfare Response to Trafficking*

Act of 2015 (H.R. 469). The legislation amends the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* to:

- ✓ Direct states to have procedures to identify and assess reports involving children who are victims of sex trafficking, and train child protective services workers on how to do so.
- ✓ Require states to identify services that address the needs of children who are victims of sex trafficking.
- ✓ Improve reporting on the number of children identified as sex trafficking victims.
- ✓ Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to report on the type and prevalence of youth trafficking victims in the welfare system, a summary of state practices for serving youth trafficking victims, and any barriers in federal law that prevent identification and assessment of youth victims of trafficking.

Enhancing Services for Runaway and Homeless Victims of Youth Trafficking Act of 2015:

Rep. Joe Heck (R-NV), along with Chairman John Kline (R-MN), Education and the Workforce Committee Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D-VA), and Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI), introduced the *Enhancing Services for Runaway and Homeless Victims of Youth Trafficking Act of 2015* (H.R. 468). The legislation amends the *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act* to:

- ✓ Enable the Secretary of Health and Human Services to apply existing grant resources to train relevant staff on the effects of human trafficking in runaway and homeless youth victims, and for developing state-wide strategies to serve such youth.
- ✓ Allow the secretary to utilize the Street Outreach Program to provide street-based services for runaway and homeless youth who are victims of trafficking.

These bills make necessary improvements to better identify and serve children who are victims of trafficking.

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