

Megan Lundborg, Youthworks

Testimony on House Bill 1003 - Human Trafficking Victims Grants

Senate Appropriations Committee

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My name is Megan Lundborg. I am a licensed social worker, an advocate, a sister, a daughter, and a survivor of human trafficking. Several years ago I was exploited and sold in the state of North Dakota. I don't tell you this for sympathy or to be told I'm strong and brave; I tell you this to give you a face, to show you this is real.

I have been a part of the anti-trafficking work in this state since the inception of the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force. I have worked primarily with the youth victims of our state. I have worked with youth, our nation's future, that feel unheard, unseen, and forgotten. I have watched them change and grow after having a team of law enforcement, prosecutors, and service providers tell them "we believe you.". Before even reaching legal adulthood, they have experienced more trauma and abuse than some experience in a lifetime. They don't experience these things because they chose to. They experience these things because they have been failed by adults in their lives. Science tells us it takes one adult to change the trajectory of someone struggling. Our task force is made up of many adults looking to be the positive, consistent advocates for the future of our state.

The past several years I have been facilitating a group called My Life My Choice. This is a prevention group for females ages 12-17 years old. What I have found is while I am providing prevention education to my referrals, over half of them have already experienced exploitation. We are reaching them after the trauma has already been inflicted. Our world continues to be evolving within social media. Social media is a major link to this crime, and the only way to combat it is to continue our knowledge, services, and team of passionate individuals fighting to provide a way out for the victims.

As a survivor, an advocate, and citizen anti-trafficking work is dear to my heart. Survivors need compassion, support, and to know they are not alone. For years I was told what happened to was not a crime, but a choice I made. As a child I wanted to be a veterinarian, not what some would refer to as a prostitute with little to no choice regarding if I would eat that day or who I would have to give my body to. I was alone. Without these services, that is how our citizens, our survivors, will remain; they will feel hopeless, destitute, and uncared for. It is our job to provide change. This could happen to your family. I never thought it would happen to mine. However, human trafficking does not discriminate. For every human trafficker and exploiter we prosecute, there are many more. This does not stop with one victim and one trafficker. It crosses our entire state, a place we should speak proudly of. We have the opportunity to be a leader in our nation, combatting a crime that effects the people and the communities, but is hidden if we choose to not see it.

Funding for these services isn't just for anti-trafficking work and intervention; these services combat substance use, mental illness, crime, and social injustices connected to the additional crimes and the victimizations linked. Please support the appropriation in the Attorney General's budget to continue to support these important services.