
Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Opening Statement
April 28, 2005

Thank you Chairwoman Pryce and Ranking Member Maloney for holding the first of what I hope will be many hearings to bring the tragic and heartbreaking issue of human trafficking to the attention of our colleagues and to all Americans. I commend you both on the moral leadership you have displayed through your efforts to help defeat this barbaric practice.

I want to also thank our panelists for appearing before us today, especially “Tina” [not her real name], who will be testifying during the second panel. Tina’s strength and courage goes beyond the limits I expect most of us could bear to consider.

This issue hits home for me. During the summer of 2004, Marie Pompee, a woman from Fort Lauderdale, pleaded guilty to keeping a young Haitian girl as a household slave for three years. The child, an immigrant whose mother had once worked as a maid for the Pompee family, had been raped repeatedly by Pompee’s son. The girl was 12 when police officers found her in the family’s \$400,000 house in the affluent Pembroke Pines community. Police reports affirmed that the

young girl was half-starved, slept on the floor and was the victim of sexual abuse. Marie Pompee's husband and son fled the country.

According to a report from the Center for the Advancement of Human Rights at Florida State University, modern-day slavery is very much alive in Florida. Human traffickers bring thousands of people to the United States every year, and it is believed that Florida, New York and Texas are the three main destinations of these slavery operations [<http://www.cahr.fsu.edu>].

While this insidious practice appears to be on the rise – aided by the boom in internet technology, the federal government's focus has shifted away from human trafficking as resources are diverted toward terrorism. According to a June 2004, State Department report, each year, 600,000 to 800,000 men, women, and children world wide are trafficked. While the State Department estimates that between 16,000 and 18,000 are trafficked into the United States each year, the CIA estimates that number to be as high as 50,000. I hope today that Ambassador Miller will be able to shed some light on this apparent disparity.

The overwhelming majority of these individuals are women and young girls. Violence against women pervades our society, cuts deep into our psyches, and, more often than not, is misunderstood and misrepresented. These undercurrents influence the way children are taught and what they see on television. Ideas and opinions about the place and role of women are formed at a young age. They affect us in our daily lives. They influence policy decisions at the highest levels, which is why I echo the calls we've heard here today and encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to work together and defeat the trafficking of human beings.