

TESTIMONY

of

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Before

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Monetary Policy, Trade, and Technology

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Chairwoman Pryce, Ranking Member Maloney, and Subcommittee members,

Thank you for convening this hearing on trafficking in persons and for giving me an opportunity to share the experience of Polaris Project, as well as my experience as a survivor. I also want to thank you for supporting the End Demand for Sex Trafficking Act – it is historic legislation that addresses a terrible and long overlooked problem. Your leadership means a tremendous amount to myself and to all our clients.

Polaris Project is a multicultural nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC and Tokyo, Japan combating trafficking in persons. We work nationally on policy advocacy and training, and work locally in the DC area conducting outreach and providing case management and services to victims of trafficking. We advocate for and serve all trafficked persons, both foreign nationals and U.S. nationals, exploited in both sex and labor trafficking. Today, however, I am going to talk about the domestic sex trafficking of U.S. citizens within our borders, an urgent crisis that has long been ignored.

I want you to think about the women and children that you have seen late at night, when you may be coming home from work or a social event. Maybe you have seen women in the streets in short dresses. You turn your heads to look away. We don't look at the faces of these young women and girls who are forced to be out in the street. Maybe we think this is what they want to do or they wouldn't be out there.

I'm going to take you back 15-20 years ago, in Chicago, IL, when I was forced to be on the streets at the age of 14. When I was 14, I ran away from home to be with a "wonderful guy I met" that was in his mid-20's. We had a great plan about us living together, making money together, and becoming rich. I thought this was everything I had always wanted, until he told me that if I loved him, I would help make money for us. By the time I thought I was in love with him, he had given me too much to go back home. I was then introduced to the other women that he was pimping, who I hadn't known about before. That's what happens with pimps - at first, it's just you and them, but then there were four of us.

We went to Cleveland, OH, and he immediately said that I was going to go “out” with the 3 other women, so they could show me how to make money for “us,” “for all of us together,” as if we were like a family. Later on that evening, his friends that he knew came by the motel. At first he told me to have sex with one of them, and I didn’t want to, so his friends raped me. Afterwards, he said “that wouldn’t have happened if I would have just listened to him at first.” So I took it as my fault. Instead of being angry at him for being raped, I was angry at myself for not listening to him in the first place. Right after that is when he picked my clothes out, told me what to wear, and forced me to go out on the streets.

When I first went out into the streets, and I had to meet my first John, I felt like this was something I didn’t want to do. I walked around the streets back and forth for hours, hiding, until the morning. Our quota was \$500 but I had only made \$50 that night to give back to the pimp. So he beat me in front of the other girls and made me go outside until I had made the money. This is the same man that took me out to eat, listened to me when I wanted to complain about my parents, and gave me words of advice, but increasingly, I was seeing a side of him that I had never seen before – a brutal side, where he repeatedly hit me in front of the other girls to show us all a lesson. Not only was I shocked, I was scared. What would happen to me if I did try to leave, and who would believe me if I told them that this was going on? So I worked from 6am until 10pm that next night, without eating or sleeping. I came back with the \$500, but in his mind, I still hadn’t learned my lesson. So I had to go back outside until 5AM the next morning. After the second day, he finally bought me something to eat, but as a punishment to never to do it again he locked me in the closet to sleep.

Pimps are sadistic. They train you. Since that first night, I’ve been locked in the closet on numerous occasions, had my arm broken with a bat, and had my finger broken which has never set right. After the abuse, the pimp would tell me to sit on his lap and ask me what was wrong. When I said, “You broke my arm,” he hit me, and asked me again what was wrong. I had to say, “I fell down.” No one else helped me. They just said I shouldn’t have upset him, which helped teach me to blame myself. I wasn’t allowed to see a doctor, so after my finger was broken, I just wrapped it with some tape.

This did not just happen to me when I was 14. It first started when I was 10 years old, in the foster care system, when I was abused by my foster mother's boyfriend. For money, he forced me and my foster brother, who was 13 years old, to have sex with men. When I tried to get assistance with social workers and let them know what was going on, it fell upon deaf ears. This brings us to the question of who is listening when our children are talking? Do we choose not to believe things because it's too hard for us to believe it's true and it's easier to ignore the problem? Or would it force us to realize that something needs to be done to the foster care system. The women and children we have come into contact with have started out on the streets at the age of 12-14, either by kidnapping from the pimp, forced into prostitution by a family member, or in the foster care system by foster parents.

What happened to me 15-20 years ago is still going on today. The young girls and women that we work with at Polaris Project are still going through the same things or worse than what I went through when I was young. Girls as young as 12 years old have to have sex 7 days a week, 365 days a year, usually from 10pm-5am. On an average night, they have sex with 10-15 people and have to meet a quota which is usually \$500-1,000 a night. The young girls and women never keep their money. Who are you going to talk to about the abuse? After awhile, you become numb to the abuse. It happens to you so much, it's just like eating breakfast in the morning. You may not like what you eat but you get used to the routine.

When we look at a victim from another country, we can immediately see, "This is a terrible thing that happened to them. They are forced to go to a foreign country where they know no one and don't know how to get help." But when we see a woman on the street here in the U.S., we think "Why is she doing it? This must be her choice. She can walk away any time she wants. She can leave." There is less sympathy for the domestic victims. Like foreign national victims, domestic victims are also moved away from their home. The pimps move these young girls and women from state to state, where they have no one to help them. They can't go back because they don't know where they are or they are ashamed to tell their families of what has happened to them. On the outside looking in, we think that there are so many resources for them, but in reality, where are the resources and how do they know about them? How can they not be afraid of what's going to happen to them on a

daily basis? How can you ask help from the police when they have done nothing but arrest you, not recognizing you are a victim of sex trafficking?

Sex trafficking of U.S. citizens is reality in every city in the United States, including right here in our nation's Capitol. Recently, we had a client who is now out of the trafficking situation. She is 22 years old, and she has been forced into prostitution for 10 years. She started out in prostitution forced by her mother at 12 years old, and then was sold to a pimp 2 days before her 14th birthday. Another client of ours was kidnapped when she was 12 years old and forced into prostitution. I can go on and on and tell you more horror stories from our clients, but that will still not create a solution to stop these pimps and sex traffickers from getting away with this mental and physical abuse of children and women and profiting from their anguish. The pimps are cocky now, not afraid of the police, not afraid of the judicial system, because they feel like they are untouchable. We, as Americans, have made them untouchable by not recognizing the problem and solving it. If we are judging the efforts of others countries to combat trafficking, we certainly must aggressively fight the trafficking of our own citizens, ensuring that no sex trafficker feels he can profit from modern-day slavery with impunity.

In addition to the human suffering they cause, traffickers generate and launder tremendous amounts of criminal profits every year. The hidden nature of these activities makes estimating its scope difficult, but some estimates of profits from trafficking range from 7-9 billion dollars annually. Taking advantage of the globalized economy and modern technology and communications, traffickers are easily transferring these funds across international borders, making it more difficult to track and combat as it moves into international banking systems.

Profits from a single sex trafficking operation are enormous, with even relatively small brothels in the United States making over a million dollars each year for the owners. Street pimps who traffic children and women using violence and threats also make tremendous profits, with their victims usually making nothing at all. In one typical case of ours at Polaris Project in the DC region, a victim sex trafficked from her early teens was generating an estimated \$130,000 in profits for her trafficker each year. We sat down and figured out that

the pimp was making about \$24,000 a month between her and other women and about \$642,000 a year tax free.

Undermining demand is key to cutting off the funding at its source, preventing the trafficking networks from generating and laundering the profits. Increased funding for training and staff for financial investigation units is necessary to match the sophistication of the criminal networks with specialized capacity within law enforcement. Use of a financial crimes strategy in investigation and prosecution has been a successful approach to dismantling trafficking networks in the United States in the past. In *United States v. Stanley Chan, et al.* the lead trafficker received 52 months imprisonment for conspiracy to commit money laundering. In *United States v. Cheryl Chadwick et al*, an attorney was indicted for laundering money for a prostitution operation in Las Vegas that is alleged to have sex trafficked minors. In *United States v. Quinton Williams*, the defendant was sentenced to 125 months for money laundering and running a sex trafficking operating victimizing women and children.

The domestic sex trafficking of women and children across the United States can only be described as a crisis. To begin to address this problem, I would like to make the following recommendations:

- 1) Recognize ALL victims of trafficking, including adult citizens who are trafficked by force or coercion.
- 2) Funding for comprehensive and specialized services, especially shelter, for domestic trafficking victims, complimenting the existing funding for foreign national victims of trafficking in persons. This is a problem in every city in the United States, and we need comprehensive services in each of those cities.
- 3) Increased funding for local training of Vice Units and Youth Service Units in police departments and of Child Protective Services to combat trafficking, including domestic sex trafficking.
- 4) Modify Sex Offender Registry to flag sex traffickers, pimps, and johns who commit sexual abuse. A federal tracking system is necessary because the sex traffickers and pimps move from state to state selling women and children.

- 5) Prosecution of hotels, advertisers, and other legal businesses that knowingly profit from or launder profits from human trafficking.

Our main focus today needs to be on protecting women and children and prosecuting pimps and sex traffickers and the demand. There is so little funding for services for domestic survivors of trafficking, though by some estimates there are hundreds of thousands of survivors like me across the United States. We must provide comprehensive and specialized care for the victims of this terrible crime, and we must make the demand and the traffickers accountable for the emotional and physical abuse they have inflicted on us and for the long-term effects that we have to live with on a daily basis. As a voice among the many who have been unheard, I thank you again for supporting the End Demand for Sex Trafficking Act., and for your commitment and continuing leadership on this issue. Now that you have the knowledge, what will you do with it?