

**Testimony before the  
House Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security**

**“Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”**

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the matter of domestic minor sex trafficking.

I am a survivor of child sex trafficking. I was 13 years old when I fell in love for the first time – he turned out to be a pimp. I was gang raped, psychologically manipulated, sold for sex, and beaten. I had a broken arm, broken finger, and broken spirit when the police found me at age 15 through a raid. Sadly, they arrested me and I spent one year in juvenile detention. *Torture...* this is the typical experience of a child sex victim.

Arrest rescued me from my pimp, but it gave me the label of delinquent. Detention gave me a year away from the daily rapes and beatings I was enduring, but it did not provide me with counseling or treatment for the trauma. I spent one year locked up and came out at the end with no referrals for services or assistance to rejoin a teenager's life in America.

Nonetheless, I took those experiences and made it my mission, as many survivors do, to be a part of the solution. A decade ago I committed to developing and providing the specialized services that I did not receive when I was the victim and soon I will provide the specialized shelter so desperately needed to truly help the hundreds of thousands of children used in prostitution in our country every year. First I founded Courtney's House in the District of Columbia which provides outreach, case management and specialized services to treat the trauma victims of child sex trafficking endure. Next I began developing Shae's Place, a shelter for girls ages 12-18 in Northern Virginia. We expect to open Shae's Place this year.

Courtney's House reaches the victims through street outreach and word of mouth. Specialized street outreach is a very important component because most victims of domestic minor sex trafficking do not self identify; they come to believe their trafficker's assertion that prostitution is their choice. And trafficking victims are under tight pimp control which prevents them from seeking out help. So Courtney's House goes to see them where they can – most often on 14<sup>th</sup> and K Streets just two blocks from the White House in our nation's capitol. We let the girls and boys know we are there for them when they are ready. We operate a 24 hour hotline for survivors by survivors who can immediately relate to the victimization of the caller. We currently have eight survivor-volunteers working with Courtney's House. Survivor informed programs and survivor leadership is critical to effective responses to trafficking.

The most debilitating gap we have at this time is the absence of a safe and appropriate shelter specifically for the boy and girl victims of domestic minor sex trafficking. Some of the twenty regular clients of Courtney's House have good homes where they can live while participating in the restorative programs and counseling we offer. They are the lucky ones. For the ones who do not, we look for placements out of state. Currently we have six clients in temporary out of state housing programs; these six will move to Shae's Place once it opens. Even those victims who do

have good homes may not be able to return to them. Their trafficker may be from the neighborhood endangering their families or their schoolmates may have learned of the prostitution they were involved in making school an unbearable environment. Living in a safe, specialized group home with others who have shared experiences encourages the disclosures and the resulting healing. Shae's Place is designed to be a long term home for the six residents with a maximum stay of three years followed by a two year aftercare program. It can take years for a victim to recover and each victim requires tailored therapy. This can only be accomplished effectively in a place of safety and trauma-centered treatment?

A shelter like Shae's Place is not inexpensive to operate. Our annual projected budget is nearly \$600,000. While this provides housing, homeschooling, counseling, therapy, as well as activities, food, clothing, and toiletries to up to six girls, it is supplemented with generous gifts of drastically reduced rent on the home, in-kind gifts of furniture and necessities, as well as volunteer activity providers and, of course, sizable grants from donors, like Shared Hope International. Also, in Virginia, every uninsured child is provided with Medicaid, allowing our budget to cover only emergency uncovered medical costs. Twenty-four hour and on-call staff are required and needed. Shae's Place is a secured facility; cameras are placed inside and outside the perimeter. A resident can leave the home but staff will be notified immediately providing the opportunity for on-the-spot counseling to defuse the girl's impulse to run away.

Our cooperation with law enforcement has been critical on both the rescue front and the aftercare programs and shelter preparations. As the most frequent first responders in a case of domestic minor sex trafficking, it is critical that they are connected to Courtney's House so that we can accompany them on raids to stabilize and advocate for any victims identified at the scene. We also follow through with case management afterward the rescue which gives the victims confidence to work with law enforcement in building cases against the offenders. Washington Metro Police Department's Youth Division, Montgomery County Police Department, Fairfax County Police Department's Anti-Child Trafficking Unit, and the FBI have all been critical law enforcement partners for us and other service providers in the field. In preparation for Shae's Place opening, we have developed a special protocol with the neighborhood law enforcement patrol identifying particular responses to potential situations with the residents that may arise.

There are group homes and shelters in the area where children are placed and some may even specialize in sheltering victims of various types of sexual exploitation; however, the special trauma suffered by a victim of domestic minor sex trafficking requires a specialized environment. This population suffers from intense embarrassment and shame having been conditioned by their trafficker to blame themselves. They also were forced to grow up fast and assume an attitude of tough, powerful girls to protect themselves. When these girls are placed in settings that are not focused on treating the trauma of sex trafficking, they will not identify with

the other children and they will usually run away within 72 hours to return to trafficker -- the only familiar environment, as dangerous as it is.

One teenaged girl we now provide services to demonstrates the problem. A victim of child sex trafficking, she felt unable to open up at the sexual abuse group therapy because her experience was so different from the others, involving the exchange of money for sex acts, the violence of the trafficking relationship, and the love she felt for her pimp that led her into the situation of being trafficking. These now-humiliating experiences prevented her from disclosing the experience and receiving appropriate trauma-based therapy. She felt the others would look down on her as often happens when peers learn of a girl's involvement in prostitution.

The Internet has played a part in the sex trafficking of every client at Courtney's House. Furthermore, every pimp has a MySpace page. Traffickers are learning how to exploit the Internet using Craigslist and backpage.com, as well as chat rooms where they become as familiar as a classmate to the girls and boys having lengthy "conversations" with them every night safely at home. Something must be done to restore safety to the Internet.

Honorable Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences. As the voice of a survivor and now a leader in providing services and, soon, specialized shelter to the victims of domestic minor sex trafficking -- boys and girls averaging 12 years old -- I implore you to pass H.R. 5575 which will enable six locations around the country to set up comprehensive responses to the child sex trafficking occurring in their cities. One of those six grants may not be made to Washington, D.C. or Northern Virginia but the benefit of six shelters somewhere in the nation, likely doubling the number of beds currently allocated to domestic minor sex trafficking victims, cannot be underestimated.