

Congressman Ted Poe  
Testimony to the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime  
Hearing on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking  
15 September 2010

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gohmert and Members of the committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today.

For several years now we have heard of the horror of international sex trafficking. But we are only just beginning to hear about the traffickers that prey on our own children, right here in America.

The FBI's Innocence Lost Task Force calls domestic minor sex trafficking the "most overlooked and under-investigated form of child sexual abuse."<sup>1</sup> Why is this the case? According to the FBI, it's because too many people believe that child prostitution is a victimless crime and that the children involved are willing participants.<sup>2</sup> This kind of thinking is wrong. These children are victims. The men that buy young girls for sex are guilty of exploitation and abuse. These traffickers and their customers are the filth of humanity. As one Texas Ranger told me, "Judge, when you see one, get a rope."

Houston, Texas, is one of the main hubs for human trafficking in the United States.<sup>3</sup> We have been dealing with this problem for a long time. However, in recent years the city has made tremendous strides towards addressing it.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Fransen, Special Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Innocence Lost Task Force, Presentation at Children's Law Symposium in Houston: *Child Prostitution* (February 17, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> News & Updates: Houston, Texas Major Hub for Human Trafficking." Humantrafficking.org. 31 Oct. 2007. 14 September 2010< <http://www.humantrafficking.org/updates/807>>

In Houston, we have one of the forty-two Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance groups in the country. Together with the FBI's Innocence Lost initiative, they have rescued over 140 domestic victims.<sup>4</sup> Numerous traffickers have been prosecuted, several receiving life sentences.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier this month, I met with the Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance. Included in this group is Houston Constable Ron Hickman—a law enforcement leader in confronting the epidemic of trafficking in Texas. He and his officers told me that one of the biggest issues they face in combating trafficking is how to care for the victims. More specifically, they told me that there is better care available to the international victims they rescue than there is for our own citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Consider what is available to an international trafficking victim in Houston right now. International victims are eligible to apply for a U-visa or a T-visa, which allows them to remain lawfully in the United States. Immigrant service groups help them apply for free legal, medical, mental, housing and educational services. Internationally trafficked children can receive care in a residential facility, or in a long-term foster home. Basically, we provide a wealth of care to internationally trafficked victims, as we should.<sup>7</sup>

But now consider the resources that are available to a victim of domestic trafficking in Houston. At the moment law enforcement agents come across victims of domestic trafficking, they are required to take them into custody. Once in custody, domestic minor victims can only gain access to services by being labeled as delinquents and charged with a class B misdemeanor

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<sup>4</sup> Meeting with Houston Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance. 8 September 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sanborn, Robert et al. "The State of Human Trafficking in Texas." Children At Risk. No date. 14 September 2010 < <http://www.childrenatrisk.org/childrenatrisk.cfm?a=cms,c,940>>

of prostitution, obtaining a permanent criminal record.<sup>8</sup> That's right—to gain access to short term services, they have to be arrested first. Furthermore, the short term services do not even begin to address the severe physical and psychological trauma that these girls have survived. Without access to this specialized care, it has been shown that trafficking victims simply return to their traffickers and continue the cycle of abuse.

What we need in Houston and throughout the nation is specialized, long term, residential treatment facilities to care for victims of domestic minor sex trafficking. Any legislation that addresses this issue must include this victim-centered component. I am proud to be an original cosponsor of H.R. 5575, introduced by my friends Congresswoman Caroline Maloney and Congressman Chris Smith, which pays close attention to the care and support of victims.

We have done a marvelous job caring for the victims that are trafficked across our border. We need to ensure that we are doing the same for our own children.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

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<sup>8</sup> Sanborn, Robert et al. "The State of Human Trafficking in Texas." Children At Risk. No date. 14 September 2010 < <http://www.childrenatrisk.org/childrenatrisk.cfm?a=cms,c,940>>