



**Testimony of Yasmin Vafa, Esq.  
Executive Director, Rights4Girls  
Maine Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
April 11, 2023**

Thank you, Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee for taking the time to consider testimony on this important bill. My name is Yasmin Vafa and I am a human rights attorney and Executive Director of Rights4Girls—a national human rights organization based in Washington, DC. I am writing today to ask you to support ***LD 1436, An Act to Provide Remedies for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation.***

At Rights4Girls, we work to end gender-based violence against marginalized young women and girls throughout the United States, including right here in New England. Specifically, we work to change the policies that allow women and girls to be criminalized when they experience sexual violence, and promote approaches that provide survivors with access to safety, justice, and support. We do so through policy advocacy, research, and training and technical assistance. In addition, we are honored to serve as members of the [U.S. Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth](#) under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services where we provide national guidance, as well as expertise and counsel to the U.S. Attorney General and the Secretary of Health of Human Services on the nation's response to human trafficking. In addition, over the last decade, we have served as adjunct judicial faculty for the [National Judicial Institute on Domestic Child Sex Trafficking](#) where we have trained more than 800 judges throughout the country on how to promote alternatives to detention for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation that appear in their courtrooms.

Just yesterday, our organization released a new report with the Georgetown Law Center on Gender Justice & Opportunity called [Criminalized Survivors: Today's Abuse to Prison Pipeline for Girls](#). The report highlights how too often, survivors are punished, blamed, and pushed into the criminal justice system because of the violence and exploitation they endure. In fact, the [Washington Post featured the report](#) and highlighted how survivors of sexual exploitation and trafficking were particularly vulnerable to this disturbing cycle.



As advocates who work at the intersection of justice reform and gender equality, **we would like to voice our strong support for LD 1436, because we believe it will help take steps to dismantle this injustice for survivors of exploitation in Maine.**

Critically, LD 1436 enables sex trade survivors to seal records of their convictions. This is vital, because it recognizes that these records are what keep so many women trapped inside the industry and unable to exit. Research has shown that most individuals in the sex trade would like to exit the industry but feel that they cannot. Often it is these very criminal records that keep survivors trapped. These records impede individuals in the sex trade from accessing safe jobs, housing, education, and other opportunities outside the sex industry. LD 1436 recognizes this fundamental injustice and works to seal survivors' records so that they can finally move on with their lives. It would be ideal if the legislation could also include an expungement component so that these records could be completely removed from survivors' records once and for all.

In addition to allowing survivors to seal their records, LD 1436 also includes important provisions that recognize the importance of services for individuals in the sex trade. We know that in order to effectively exit the industry and stay out, we must adopt policies that i) repeal the crime of engaging in prostitution for survivors, ii) provide survivors criminal record relief, and iii) provide essential services and exit support to individuals in the sex trade. **That is why it is absolutely crucial that this legislation passes along with the bill that was heard earlier today, LD 1435, *An Act to Reduce Commercial Sexual Exploitation*. These bills are complimentary and must be passed together in order to provide the protection to truly support Maine's survivor population.**

For these reasons, we ask you to **please vote "ought to pass" on LD 1436** and its complimentary bill, LD 1435. Please help support Maine's survivors.

Sincerely,

Yasmin Vafa, Esq.  
Executive Director  
Rights4Girls