

March 27, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Tricia Grant and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of Just Love Worldwide and If Only 1. Our organization provides direct support to people of all ages who have experienced trafficking, exploitation, and prostitution. We also offer education to our community and engage in legislative efforts to combat efforts to legalize prostitution and to advocate for bills that will better protect and offer much needed services to people being victimized.

I am here today in support of LD 1092, "An Act to Prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the State." Thank you Senator Stover for introducing this bill.

As a survivor of CSEC, in addition to being the Executive Director of Just Love, I also share my personal story to better help our community understand that the trafficking/exploitation of vulnerable people is happening

now and has been happening for many years in every community of our state.

At 12, I had been living with family other than my parents and at 15, I was living on my own with my little boy. 3 months after my son was born, I was being sold in strip clubs, hotels, truck stops, and people's homes while still caring for my son, attending school and managing my home. This exploitation would happen several days a week for a year and a half and I wouldn't know that there was a name for what was being done to me or that it wasn't my fault, for 16 years and I wouldn't talk about it for another 18 months. My story is not at all uncommon..

A 13 year old I have been connected with since November, due to suspicions of having experienced exploitation ,is currently in a hospital up north because she needed a safe space to be while processing the trauma of being assaulted by 2 men and is now dealing with an STI and suicidal thoughts. Her mom has fought, from the beginning, harder than most to put protections in place to prevent this assault from happening and is now picking up the pieces while falling apart herself.

Just this morning, I was called by a nurse in a local hospital because somebody I had worked with in a group

home here in Maine when she was 15, is now 20 and has disclosed that she is being exploited and does not know who she can trust so she reached out to me. When I leave here today, I will be spending the night helping her feel safe and just being with there and spend the next few days helping her connect to the very few services that we have to offer.

The services that are being requested through this bill are necessary and long overdue. We need to better support people being exploited and the people working tirelessly to offer services. If these services had been in place when I was 15, my life would have looked very different. The 13 year old I'm now supporting, needs these services now to start her healing journey. The 20 year old I'll be connecting with this evening could have surely benefited from these services 5 years ago. We need to better protect our youth and this is why I am in support of LD 1092.

Please reach out if you'd like to discuss further.

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