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*Testimony of Rep. Lois Galgay Reckitt introducing*  
**LD 1436, An Act to Provide Remedies for Survivors of Commercial Sexual  
Exploitation**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Lois Galgay Reckitt, and I represent House District 122 in South Portland. I am here today to introducing **LD 1436, An Act to Provide Remedies for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation.**

I am aware that earlier this afternoon you listened to a variety of witnesses, including testimonials from survivors of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, formerly characterized as prostitution. And you have heard from other interested parties.

I believe strongly that after nearly 7 years of service in the Maine House, that the vast majority of members are with me in the desire to decrease the demand for commercial sex in Maine.

That is why, two years ago, I brought before you the comprehensive bill ultimately passed by the House and Senate. Unfortunately, in my view, it was later subject to a successful veto by the Chief Executive and did not become law.

As a result, today, my focus and that of others, is to share with you the successes in this approach that have occurred in other jurisdictions – both in the United States and abroad. Those results belie the erroneous perception that partial decriminalization of what we called prostitution will cause an increase in the sex trade in Maine.

In fact, the opposite has been proven. Since 2021, we have used this time to work with and observe a pilot project in Androscoggin County. Sex buyers, who fuel the market for commercial sexual exploitation, are being held accountable. Yet, we do not have a network, or system of support, for those eager to leave the sex trade—which we understand is the majority of those in it according to academic research conducted over the last 20 years.

The focus of the bill currently before you is on the other side of the coin: How do we ensure that the survivors of trafficking and other types of coercion, including violence, poverty and drugs (as well as a myriad of other factors), who are (mostly) women and their children, receive assistance to exit that misery in order to live safely and productively?

Sections 1 through 7 outlines how those convicted of engaging in prostitution in the past can seal records of past offenses. If you have never been in “the life,” you may not have thought of the myriad ways that a conviction record can stop you in your tracks as you seek to move on.

Such a record will prevent you from obtaining a wide variety of jobs or from renting an apartment or house, or from getting a federal student loan to complete your education. Most important to many women who have children and are in this circumstance: such a record can threaten you with the loss of custody of your children. Sealing these records can help pave the way to a new life.

This bill creates a survivor and human trafficking victim assistance stakeholder group under the auspices of the Department of Health and Human Services. This group is charged with searching out all available sources of funding for services needed by survivors in order to both recover emotionally and physically and to prepare to start on a new life path.

In Section 9: The stakeholder group will issue a report that, I believe, should be given to the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, the Health and Human Services Committee and this Judiciary Committee. That report should be expected by March 1, 2024, in time for the committees to report out legislation, based upon the findings, to the Second Regular Session of the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature.

Section 10 focuses on Data Collection: There is no question that data collection should occur as steps are taken by various public and private entities to implement this reform. What data, from whom and how often it should be collected will depend on the development of law enforcement protocols by stakeholders, including both the criminal enforcement stakeholders and the service delivery stakeholders. I anticipate a crucial role to be played by the Judiciary as well as prosecutors.

We are very fortunate this legislative session. Why? Two years ago, I sought to develop and support an implementation and services pilot program on this subject. Fortunately, primarily due to outstanding dedication and persistence of prosecutors and a non-profit in Androscoggin County, we can already see that the demand reduction model I seek in presenting this bill can work, and **it is working**.

Now, our charge is to learn from those efforts and spread the solutions.