

Ilonka Deaton
Jaco Booyens Ministries TX
LD 1877

Testimony of Ilonka Deaton
In Support of LD 1877 – An Act to Increase Penalties for Human Trafficking
Offenses

Before the Maine Judiciary Committee – May 2025

Good morning, Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ilonka Deaton. I am the Director of Advocacy for Jaco Booyens Ministries and serve on the Board of Directors for The Reisman Institute, which educates and advocates to protect children from sexual exploitation. I speak to you today as both an advocate and a survivor of human trafficking.

From the ages of 12 to 18, I was trafficked in the music industry. I know the devastating effects of coercion and exploitation—and the lifelong journey of recovery survivors must face. That is why I rise in full support of LD 1877.

This bill takes a much-needed step forward in ensuring traffickers receive meaningful punishment and survivors receive justice. Raising mandatory minimum sentences, increasing fines, requiring electronic monitoring, and mandating restitution are not excessive—they are necessary. These measures are proportionate to the gravity of the crimes and the trauma they inflict.

I especially commend the bill's provision to increase penalties for trafficking offenses committed near schools, shelters, juvenile facilities, and treatment centers. These are the very locations traffickers target to access vulnerable children and adults. It's time we cut off that access.

I've supported similar legislation in other states. In Tennessee, I testified for House Bill 1181, a bill that successfully required age verification for online pornographic content—because unregulated digital access to explicit material is often a gateway to trafficking. I've also testified for the repeal of the Obscenity Exemption for Public Schools, and to eliminate Sovereign and Qualified Immunity protections for school systems that have failed to act in abuse and grooming cases. These are all part of a broader effort to hold systems accountable and protect the vulnerable.

Maine has an opportunity today to lead the way with strength and compassion. LD 1877 is more than policy—it is protection, prevention, and a message to survivors that they are seen and valued.

Thank you for your time and for taking a bold stand for justice.

Respectfully,
Ilonka Deaton
Director of Advocacy, Jaco Booyens Ministries
Board Member, The Reisman Institute