



**Committee on Judiciary
Testimony of Rights4Girls
In Support of
LD 2168**

February 3, 2026

Thank you, Members of the Committee, for taking the time to consider testimony on this important legislation.

At Rights4Girls, we work to end gender-based violence against vulnerable young women and girls throughout the United States, including right here in Maine. We do so through policy advocacy, research, coalition building, and training and technical assistance. Through our National Judicial Institute on Child Sex Trafficking we have trained more than 1,000 judges nationwide on how to improve their responses to survivors of sexual exploitation. We have also worked extensively to shed light on the importance of confronting the demand for commercial sex—a critical means of sex trafficking prevention—a chief goal of this legislation.

Recently, our organization released a report called [Buyers Unmasked: Exposing the Men Who Buy Sex & Solutions to End Exploitation](#), featuring sex buyer quotes from across the country to expose the ways in which these individuals view and discuss the people they purchase for sex acts. By showcasing sex buyers in their own words, highlighting key trends among their attitudes, and revealing demographic data of sex buyers versus sex trade survivors exposing their profound inequalities, we demonstrate all the reasons why these (predominantly men) need to be held accountable for the devastating harm they cause. It is for these reasons that we strongly urge the committee to support LD 2168—to hold sex buyers accountable while simultaneously helping to fund services for trafficking survivors.

Across the country, prostituted women and girls bear the brunt of the legal consequences associated with the sex trade, while the men who purchase them largely enjoy impunity and anonymity.¹ Nationally, women account for 62% of adult prostitution arrests while girls account for roughly 71% of youth arrests, despite being considered child sex trafficking victims under the law.² Even when children are bought and sold, the consequences for sex buyers are minimal. A report by Shared Hope International revealed that in 134 cases of men purchasing sexual acts from

¹ Rights4Girls. “Racial & Gender Disparities in the Sex Trade.” 2024.

² Id.



minors across the country, 26% served no time and 69% of all sentences were suspended.³

The disproportionate punishment of sex trade survivors is profoundly unjust especially when considering the extraordinary level of trauma they endure at the hands of buyers and exploiters. According to a Colorado medical study, the mortality rate of women in prostitution is 200 times the rate of the general population.⁴ Physical and sexual violence committed by exploiters and traffickers, but most often by sex buyers—includes rape and gang rape. More specifically, 92% of women in the sex trade report being shot, strangled, burned, beaten, stabbed, raped, or punched—often at the hands of sex buyers.⁵

Prostituted women also report being urinated, defecated, and ejaculated upon, forced to have unprotected sex, and subjected to the insertion of foreign objects into their bodies.⁶ One recent study found that 98% of the prostituted women surveyed had been raped by sex buyers or pimps.⁷ Given these horrific acts, it is not surprising that 68% of prostituted women meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as severe as combat veterans and victims of state torture.⁸

LD 2168 would hold sex buyers accountable, end their anonymity, and help curb the demand that keeps this violent system churning. The fines generated by this bill would additionally help provide services for survivors; allowing them an opportunity to rebuild their lives.

At a time when federal dollars are uncertain and states budgets are constrained, this legislation will provide a mechanism to fund victims' services by offsetting the negative consequences of buyers' actions.

It's beyond time to allow survivors the chance to move beyond their trauma and start anew while holding accountable those who are contributing to their lifelong suffering.

We therefore ask Members of the Committee to please stand with survivors and pass LD 2168.

Thank you.

³ *Demanding Justice Report*, (Shared Hope International, 2014).

⁴ John J. Potterat et al., "Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women," *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 159, no. 8 (April 15, 2004): 778–85.

⁵ Jody Raphael and Katie Feifer, "Get the Facts: What We Know about Sex Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution in the United States," (World Without Exploitation, January 2020), <https://www.equalitymodelus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Get-the-Facts- January-2020.pdf>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Melissa Farley et al., "Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2, no. 3–4 (2004): 33–74, https://doi.org/10.1300/J189v02n03_03.

⁸ Melissa Farley et al., "Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2, no. 3–4 (2004): 33–74, https://doi.org/10.1300/J189v02n03_03.