

ATEST NATIONAL CALL ON CHILD WELFARE

Humanity United
02-20-14 – 12:00 PM ET

*Please note that Arkadin Conferencing Services produced this written transcript after the conclusion of the ATEST National Call on Child Welfare.

Operator: *Welcome to the ATEST National Call on Child Welfare Conference Call. My name is Janette, and I will be your operator for today's call. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode. Later, we will conduct a question-and-answer session. Please note that this conference is being recorded.*

I will now turn the call over to Meredith Owen. Ms. Owen, you may begin.

Melysa Sperber: Hi. My name is Melysa Sperber, and I'm the Director of the Alliance To End Slavery and Trafficking. I'm very grateful for everyone joining us today, and we're really excited to brief everyone on the progress that we're making on the issue of the child welfare system's response to human trafficking. ATEST, as many of you know, is a coalition of 11 U.S.-based human rights organizations that advocate together for solutions to prevent and end human trafficking. Today, we'll have a number of our members briefing everyone on their work related to child welfare.

When we last spoke was over a year ago and we had at the time been advocating and continue to advocate for H.R. 1732, the child welfare bill that is being championed by representative Bass and Marino. Since then, we were thrilled that Senator's Rubio and Hagan in December of last year introduced a companion, 1823, to Bass and Marino's bill in the House, and that's part of what we'll be talking about today.

And with that, I'm really excited to hand it over to my colleague, Faiza, from ECPAT-USA.

Faiza Mathon-Mathieu: Hi, everyone, and thank you for joining us. My name is Faiza Mathon-Mathieu. I'm the Director of Public Policy and Government Relations at ECPAT-USA, and we are just so happy to be talking about this important bill, H.R. 1732 and S.1823. This bill is so important and incredibly necessary because, as many of you know, children in the child welfare system are particularly vulnerable to this type of exploitation and so I want to start off by sharing with everyone a story of one survivor in particular who was commercially sexually exploited from the ages of 11 to 17.

When she describes how her experience in the child welfare system made her more vulnerable to sex trafficking, she notes that from a very young age she learned that she was linked to a check and she felt her foster parents only took her in to get the money, so it wasn't hard for her trafficker to convince her that her only worth was her financial gain. She also describes the lack of control she felt within the child welfare system. She

was moved from placement to placement, often after reporting instances of assault or sexual abuse, and this made it much easier for her trafficker to control her movement. Ultimately, her longest relationship was that of with her trafficker and his family. And yet despite her extended involvement with the child welfare system, she was only identified as a victim of trafficking through her interaction with the juvenile justice system.

In fact, the first point of contact for most children in child trafficking victims will likely be law enforcement in conjunction with a state child welfare agency. Unfortunately, most state child protection professionals don't have the training, protocol, procedures to identify and respond appropriately to child trafficking cases. These are complex cases. They're time consuming and, as a result, we're finding that most of the foreign victims of human trafficking don't receive trafficking-specific victim center services and children and youth who are U.S. citizens in too many jurisdictions and by the media even are often misidentified as juvenile prostitutes or criminals and placed in the juvenile justice system. Ultimately both foreign and U.S. citizens are left without critical support, which leaves them vulnerable to further exploitation and abuse. We know that this is a problem that affects children that often come from the child welfare system as well because exploiters prey upon these already vulnerable kids. Other factors that make children at risk: A history of sexual and physical abuse, being a runaway or homeless youth. Boys are often overlooked as possible victims of sex trafficking, as many boys are lured into sex trafficking to survive on the street, and this is not seen by many organizations that focus only on girls or have a limited amount of resources to even serve young boys.

Data is also showing us that child trafficking is a serious problem within the child welfare system, so we have some statistics. In 2013, 60 percent of the child sex trafficking victims recovered as part of an FBI nationwide raid from over 70 cities were children from foster care group homes. In 2012, Connecticut reported that 88 child victims of sex trafficking - - reported 88 child victims of sex trafficking, 86 were child welfare involved, and that's the most reported - - and that most reported abuse while they were in foster care or residential placement, and a New York State study showed that more than 85 percent of identified commercially sexually exploited children in the state had prior child welfare involvement. At ATEST, we recently conducted a survey with 94 runaway and homeless youth organizations, of which 42 responded. These organizations were able to identify potential child labor trafficking cases. One organization had identified as many as 150 labor traffic abuse *[sic]*, the majority of whom were U.S. citizens in the last three years. Another had identified 122 labor traffic abuse during the same time period and a recently report released a study from May 2013 by Covenant House identified both sex and labor traffic abuse within their existing populations. The study interviewed 174 youth receiving services from Covenant House and found that 12 percent of the youth had experienced sex trafficking and 3 percent had experienced labor trafficking.

So sex trafficked and labor trafficked children need immediate access to shelter, medical care, and therapy, and we believe that this should not come through the juvenile justice system but rather through a system that is designed to protect and prevent the abusive children, and that's the child welfare system. And furthermore, the

child welfare system's involvement is so critical because it singles an important shift in the community at large that these are children who are actually victims of child abuse and not criminals. So we want to make sure that this invisible population is identified, and this is the first step, this bill - - these bills are an important first step in preventing child trafficking.

So I'm going to pass it off to my colleague Brittany from Polaris who can delve more deeply into some of the stats I had just started to mention.

Brittany Vanderhoof: Thanks, Faiza. My name is Brittany Vanderhoof. I'm the Policy Counsel for Polaris Project. One aspect of Polaris Project's programmatic work is the operation of the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, the NHTRC. The NHTRC is the national hotline owned by the Department of Health and Human Services, and Polaris Project operates it by virtue of a grant. We've been operating the hotline since December of 2007 and in that time we've been able to collect an enormous amount of data on trafficking in the United States. Now it's important to note that this data is not a prevalent study. Prevalence, as I'm sure most of you know, is a question that we struggle with in this field on a daily basis. It's very difficult to tell what the scope of human trafficking in the United States is. However, the call data from the NHTRC can give us a snapshot of trends, of the people who are receiving the hotline number, and who are choosing to call it.

So when we're talking about children specifically, the NHTRC has received more than 5,000 calls involving 3,600 potential cases of human trafficking involving minors, and this is a side note. A call is a different from a case. A case is a number that is assigned to a specific instance of trafficking or a specific victim of trafficking and there could be multiple calls involved with a case. So of those 3,600 potential cases involving minor trafficking victims, 75 percent of those cases reference sex trafficking and pimp control trafficking was the number one type of sex trafficking reference, followed by Internet-based commercial sex, also with truck stops and commercial front (inaudible) coming in the top five. Fourteen percent of our cases involved labor trafficking of children. Peddling rings and door-to-door sales crews were at the top of the list, followed by domestic work, and 2 percent of the cases involved both sex and labor trafficking. The rest of the cases, a specific type of trafficking was not referenced. Now of these 3,600 cases, we've identified that over 300 of those cases involved children that had interacted with the child welfare system before. That's about 8 percent of the cases. Seventy-six percent of the kids that had interacted with the child welfare system were victim - - were potential victims of sex trafficking, 11 percent were victims of labor trafficking, and 2 percent were victims of both. Pimp control trafficking was the most frequently cited form of trafficking when you look at children that have interacted with the child welfare system.

The contact that - - the way that kids came into contact with the child welfare system varied differently among the calls, although first being identified through the juvenile justice system and then child welfare, being runaway or homeless youth, and coming into the child welfare system that way. Some children came into contact with the child

welfare system because their parent or guardian was trafficking them and a significant number of those cases were children that were already wards of the state or in foster care and then were trafficked.

What this information tells us is a number of things. One is that not all cases involve the child welfare system first, but we are seeing a significant connection. The other thing that it tells us is that we need to be making sure that we are including both labor and sex trafficking in the systems that are being created around child welfare. While most of the cases that we've seen come through the hotline have involved sex trafficking, 11 percent, and then if you include the 2 percent with both, is a very significant number and we should not be creating systems that are going to ignore significant victim population. This data goes to show that while the focus on sex trafficking is absolutely necessary, we need to make sure that labor is included in these systems as well.

And I'm going to turn now over to Stephanie from CAST in L.A.

Stephanie Richard: Thanks so much, Brittany. My name is Stephanie. I'm the Policy and Legal Services Director at the Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking, and I've worked at CAST directly with survivors of modern day slavery for the last nine years. And I can tell you that in Los Angeles and from what I've seen across the country, child welfare systems have been really slow to step up to the plate to address this issue because these kids have been seen as the bad kids making bad choices and have really been thrown into the juvenile justice system. So given the presentation you just heard, ATEST and many others out there have really identified the need to transform the child welfare system to better address the issue of all forms of child trafficking; and that is through the bill that Melysa mentioned at the beginning of the call, H.R. 1732, the Strengthening the Child Welfare Response to Human Trafficking Act of 2013, which we are fortunate enough to now have a senate companion version, S.1823; and we know that each child welfare system operates differently at the state level, so we are going to need to do as coalition and as advocates in this movement individual work in each of our different states. However, there is a way that the federal government can play a role, and we think that this is what the framework of this bill does. It creates a very first and important step for better engaging the child welfare system.

And how does it do that? I'm going to run through the very specific provisions so that you have an understanding of the substance of the bill. So as I said, Section 1 of the bill is the title and the (inaudible) is titled the *Strengthening the Child Welfare Response to Human Trafficking Act*. The second section really deals with best practices to combat trafficking of children. So the idea being that there is some work being done at the state level by pioneering child welfare agencies, but this work is really been done in silos and the majority of states have not even started this work and so what this bill asks is that the Department of Health and Human Services at the federal level compile really concrete information, protocols, and best practices that then can be used as resources for the individual states working on this. It's important to note that we're not trying to dictate what the state should do to address this issue, what we're trying to do is give them resources and a better starting point. And so the types of best practices the bill

outlines and directs HHS to report is around collaboration, so a sample protocol for effective cross-system collaborations in local and nonprofit systems specifically focusing on government agencies like child welfare, medical and health (inaudible), and local police and juvenile detention centers. It also really looks at residential placement because we know that shelter options for this population is particularly challenging and trying to establish a best practices and recommendations for safe residential placement for traffic youth. It also looks at best practices around documentation and data collection because we know we cannot effectively address this issue without effectively understanding this problem and there really is a dearth - - a lack of data in all - - in the whole trafficking movement overall and we want especially with regard to our children, we want to have better data on who's being impacted. And it also asks HHS to come up with best practices and guidance around prevention, so how do we stop kids from being recruited into this situation in the first place.

So in the next part of the bill in Section 3 really looks at also helping the federal government collect better data around child trafficking. Now and how does the federal government do that? It does it because it has the power of the purse string, meaning it funds a lot of the child welfare programs in each of the individual 50 states, and it does it under two different specific provisions. The first of them is the Social Security Administration Act, Section 7b, and the second is under the CAPTA, or the Child Abuse and Protection Act. Both of those bills provide significant funding for state child welfare programs, and the states are to receive that funding are already required to provide reports to the federal government on different work and programs they're doing and so this bill basically puts on an additional requirement around reporting and data collection specifically around child trafficking to receive that federal money. So again, we don't think this is a huge burden for states because they're already doing these types of reports, but what it does and what we hope it does is start creating a state dialogue because each of the states is going to have to report on this to get a significant source of their funding for their child welfare program. Now at this point states can say, "We don't have data" or "We don't have a policy" or "We don't have specific programs around - - for trafficked children" and that would meet the requirement, but what we hope is that if they are forced (inaudible) each year to receive their funding that in the future they'll start looking at this project - - problem and being able to collect appropriate data on both sex and labor trafficking cases so we know the extent of the problems in our system as well as reporting on the specialized plans they have.

And then the last section of the bill, Section 4, looks at: Well once we've asked states to provide this type of data, we want them to collect it in a good report so that we at the federal level can maybe understand what (inaudible) next might be needed, whether it be federal action or state action.

And so within 18 months after the date of enactment of the act, the bill requires that the Department of Health and Human Services come out with a report that really highlights the prevalence of trafficking that the states are identifying as well as looking at general trends and some other very specific information.

So that is an overall summary of the bill and I just do want to take one minute to highlight why this bill is so personally important to CAST and to myself. I do do direct legal intakes with trafficking survivors and I worked with one young woman who told me she'd been recruited by her trafficker (inaudible) at the age of 11 and at that time no one was telling her anything different than what he was saying. And she said, "But if anyone would've said anything different to me, I would've just easily believed them." But she said, "Now," and she's 17, "Now, it's just too hard because I can't believe anything else that because this is what I'm good for." And so really law enforcement cannot identify our children early enough to prevent this violence and abuse and we really need our schools and our child welfare workers and our medical and mental health professionals who are all linked to our child welfare system to be recognizing the early signs and being that voice that says something different to that child so that they don't end up a slave to begin with. And then just to highlight how important it is to really look at the issue of sex and labor trafficking. There's a particularly serious case here in California that we've been working with of a child who was labor trafficked who was actually placed in a small metal box and kept there, sexually assaulted, but then she was actually forced to cultivate marijuana and clear case of labor trafficking because she wasn't used for commercial sex, she was used in another illegal act. However, this case is being looked at for federal prosecution, but initially it was only seen as an abuse of a child in a drug operation and there was no labor trafficking connected, and that child also was arrested. So we have to remember that there are really serious cases involving both sex and labor trafficking out there that are continuing to be misidentified and the children continue to be criminalized as opposed to the victims they are, and this is why this piece of legislation is so significant.

So now I'm going to turn it over to Cory to kind of give you the political update and hopefully we can talk about what you on the call can do to help us pass this piece of legislation.

Cory Smith: Thank you very much, Stephanie, and thanks to everyone for joining today's call and for your care and concern for the child welfare response to human trafficking. My name is Cory Smith. I'm Policy Counsel for ATEST. As you've already heard, and you got a lot of important information, data, and justification action off of the bill, we currently have two bills. We have the House bill, which was introduced back in April of 2013. That's H.R. 1732 that was introduced by Representative Bass, a Democrat for California, Representative Marino, a Republican from Pennsylvania. That bill has 45 cosponsors, about a quarter of those cosponsors are Republicans. The reality is that we know we'll get Democrats, but what we really need to focus on in particular with the House because it is controlled by Republicans and the committees are controlled by Republicans, we need Republican cosponsors and so want to highlight that and flag that. This bill's been out for a while. It does have a quarter of the cosponsors, but we need more Republicans. I'm going to talk a little bit more about that in detail towards the end of my presentation, but just wanted to flag the Republican being on the House bill and we can also follow-up with some information about options that you could look at specifically, Republican options. On the Senate side, we have the Senate version, which is a mere version of the House bill, and that's S.1823. That was

introduced by Senator Rubio, a Republican from Florida, and the original Dem sponsor was Senator Hagan, a Democrat from North Carolina. That has been joined by Senator Markey, a Democrat from Massachusetts, and Senator Cochran, a Republican from Mississippi. That bill was introduced right before Christmas in December, so it's not been out there as long, but we certainly need to build the Republican support for that bill. It's extremely important to get the momentum and get traction and to move the bill forward.

A couple things before we talk about some specific members in the Senate that you can target. One, if you need to look at the cosponsors down the road to see if your member's on, you can go to (inaudible), which is at beta.congress.gov. You can type the bill numbers we just gave you. If you don't remember, you can go to the Policy & Resources' section on ATEST's website, that's EndSlaveryAndTrafficking.org and there's a Policy & Resources' section. There you'll see a Child Welfare Response to Human Trafficking section that includes information on both bills, a sign-on letter. It has one-pagers you can take. I highly recommend you look at those one-pagers and feel free to take them and use them if you do meetings in your state and your district. I think it'd be really, really important to be able to do meetings in-district/in-state particular when there's work periods or when the members are on recess. When your members are back in-state in-district, it's extremely important that they hear from you, your constituents. Frankly, they're tired of hearing from people like me that are in your D.C.. Your voters and your voice really matters, so I just want to flag that and those resources are available.

On the Senate bill, I just want to click through a list of some Republicans that would be important to get on S.1823, and we'll follow-up with this via email, but Senator Murkowski, who's from Alaska; Senator Alexander, a Republican from Tennessee; Senator Hatch, a Republican from Utah; Senator Enzi, a Republican from Wyoming; Senator Burr, a Republican from North Carolina; Senator Paul, Republican from Kentucky; Senator Isakson, Republican from Georgia; Senator Roberts, a Republican from Kansas; Senator Kirk, a Republican from Illinois; and Senator Scott, a Republican from South Carolina. And then there's two other senators we think are pretty likely that aren't on the committee that controls the bill - Senator Ayotte, a Republican from New Hampshire, and Senator Collins, a Republican from Maine. Again, anything you could do to reach out to these offices or other Republican offices that you live in their district for the House bill would be extremely helpful.

If you have any questions at all or need more information, my email is CSmithHU, that's C-S-M-I-T-H-H-U@gmail.com. You'll find I'm extremely responsive. I just did a call with a constituency a few weeks ago. I've had a lot of emails back and forth just helping out giving information. It'd be wonderful if you have a meeting, if you get a positive or negative response to let me know so we can get that intelligence collected. We could also do a follow-up based on your good work in D.C. if you get a good response or there's something else that needs to be addressed. And so again, just want to remind of your power's constituents and how important your voice is and if there's any questions

at all, if you need anything, any questions about anything we've talked about, please feel free to email me and I'm happy to help in any way I can.

I think with that, I'll turn it back over to Melysa, and thank you.

Melysa Sperber: Thank you so much, Cory; and thanks to Faiza, Brittany, Stephanie as well for their remarks. We're very grateful. At this time, we'll - - we're available to take questions and so if you do have a question, you can indicate (inaudible) to the operator and we'll answer.

Operator: *Thank you. We will now begin the question-and-answer session. If you have a question, please press star then one on your touchtone phone. If you wish to be removed from the queue, please press the pound sign or the hash key. There will be a delay before the first question is announced. If you're using a speakerphone, you may need to pick up the handset first before pressing the numbers. Once again, if you have a question, please press star then one on your touchtone phone. And I'm showing no questions at this time.*

Melysa Sperber: Okay. Well as Cory mentioned, we're all available over email and by phone to answer any follow-up questions, and we'll certainly be in touch with everyone with a follow-up email with information. We would be very grateful if you haven't already to join our sign-on letter in support of these important bills, in particular the Rubio-Hagan bill in the Senate. We'd also be very grateful if you followed on Cory (inaudible) advice to really cultivate some Republican support for these measures, and we will follow-up with the specific list of priority targets that Cory announced. We'll also have a transcript and audio available and we hope that you're able to share this widely so that we can get the word out and really begin to get additional cosponsors onto these measures that we believe will have great impact in not only improving the way that we respond to child trafficking, but the way that we can prevent children from being exploited in the first place.

So with that, thank you so much for joining us today, and we look forward to staying in touch and engaged on this issue. Bye-bye.

Operator: *Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This concludes today's conference. Thank you for participating. You may now disconnect.*

Please Note: * Proper names/organizations spelling not verified.

[sic] Verbatim, might need confirmation.

- - Indicates hesitation, faltering speech, or stammering.