FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The NATIONAL SURVIVOR NETWORK is delighted that Trafficking Survivors Relief Act (S. 3441 and H.R. 6292) sponsored by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) has been introduced at the federal level.

The National Survivor Network (NSN), a network of trafficking survivors in the United States, was created in February 2011 by the Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST). The NSN’s mission is to bring together a community of survivors of human trafficking, by creating a platform for survivor-led advocacy, peer-to-peer mentorship, and empowerment that embraces all survivors, regardless of gender, age, nationality or type of trafficking experience. Members include men and women survivors of human trafficking from 32 different states and 20 different countries.

The NSN believes that in order for survivors to become productive members of society, vacating criminal records is imperative to their moving on in their lives. NSN members believe these criminal barriers incurred during their exploitation halt movement from victim to survivor. The NSN surveyed 130 members and the majority of survivors reported that they had suffered long-term impacts from the arrests and convictions they faced as a trafficking victim. More than 70% reported this had created a barrier when seeking employment and more than half reported it as a barrier to housing. Lack of housing and employment are often cited as significant factors in creating vulnerability to trafficking or other form of exploitation.

NSN members said the following:

“Vacatur of criminal charges received while under the control of traffickers is essential for human trafficking survivors to rebuild their lives.” ~Marti MacGibbon, CADC-II, ACRPS, Survivor Leader, Speaker and Advocate, Marti Mac Enterprises, LLC, Member NSN

“Criminal conviction for crimes traffickers forced trafficking victims to commit, have a long term impact in the life of survivors and creates long term barriers to housing, employment, and education. Survivors work really hard to get back on their feet and they deserve a chance to live the “American Dream”! ~ Ima Matul, CAST Survivor Coordinator, NSN Chair

“With past criminalization of victims, continued arrests, and complications from those arrests in getting jobs, education, and housing survivors are being punished for being victims. This level of
victim shaming is a life sentence upon survivors of some of the most heinous crimes in the US. We need clear methods to remove the punishment we face in our lives for being victims of a crime.” ~ Nat Paul, NSN member

"Vacatur laws are the next logical and most essential step in furthering more complete restoration for survivors. Without them, we allow the perpetrator to continue harming victims even after they've escaped a trafficking situation. Justice doesn't always come in a courtroom, and even when it does with the conviction of a trafficker...often even those victims who cooperated end up suffering injustices due to the coercion of the trafficking scheme. Survivors who are ready to take that step towards a new life deserve the fresh start to be able to do so, as well as competent and trauma-informed pro bono legal assistance to help them do it." ~"Amy Smith", Juris Doctorate, OVC Consultant, NSN member, Consultant West FL Center for Trafficking Advocacy

“For over 25 years I have lived with a heavy burden of having bad checks on my record. I had been forced by my trafficker to write them, and then when we ran out, I was forced into truck stops. Law enforcement did not believe my story of being trafficked. I never had broken the law before and never again afterwards. MY TRAFFICKERS should have to pay - not me - Once again, I feel victimized!” ~Lynn Sweetland, Survivor Leader, Member /Consultant of NSN, Advocate and Abolitionist

If you are a survivor and would like to join the National Survivor Network, please contact Ima Matul at Ima@castla.org.

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