



February 25, 2014

Greetings Chairperson Connie O'Brien and Members of the House Committee on Children and Seniors.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the topic of Human Trafficking in Kansas. I am a survivor of over two decades of being sex trafficked, before it was a recognized as the atrocity that it is today. I founded Veronica's Voice in 2000, to help other women whose lives are being ravaged by this inhuman, misunderstood, victim blaming issue of commercial sexual exploitation. I have been providing my own story and a reflection of those we serve at Veronica's Voice to help educate on this matter, since the beginning.

I cannot speak on labor trafficking but there are other experts that can talk on that aspect of trafficking. Nor does Veronica's Voice focus on the trafficking of those that are underage even though we do serve those that are underage when they are referred. We went right to the obvious visible victims. The vast majority of persons we see are mostly adult women but we also serve males as well as those exploited that identify as transgender. We serve approximately 500 individuals every year at our Safe Center. That does not include the 300 plus every year to whom we provide outreach services. We serve the entire Kansas City Metro-plex and have not tracked who comes from Kansas versus Missouri, as they tend to move back and forth across the state line. We have always served those in need no matter what side of the state line they were on.

### The Voice for the Sexually Exploited

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We provide outreach services, case management, peer support, groups, emergency walk-in services, and we also run a 24 hour crisis line as well as provide educational presentations on the reality of commercial sexual exploitation and advocacy work. We have clearly shown there is a huge need for services and safe housing for adult victims. Veronica's Voice is currently restructuring what we do, by closing our Safe Center and beginning to strictly focus on getting a home open. We are looking to relocate into Wyandotte County.

We wonder why the identification of sex trafficking victims is so complicated. As Einstein said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." When someone says they are a victim of domestic violence, they are not asked to prove it; they are connected with help, regardless of their age. Why is it that there is such an emphasis on minors? It is easy to understand that it is wrong for a child to be prostituted. When a prostituted person goes from the age of 17 to 18, nothing in their circumstances has changed. However, from that day on they are treated as a criminal instead of the victim they are. Many victims enter into societal systems and are seen as simply prostitutes or addicts. If the right questions were asked of those that are arrested, runaways, homeless, or children that have been removed from their homes, many of them could be identified as trafficking/prostitution victims. Many in law enforcement and most of society see prostitution as a choice but this is not the reality that a prostituted person experiences. Sex trafficking and prostitution are the same. No one would willingly choose this life. A prostituted person feels as if they have no other choice, no other option for survival. Below is a summary of clinical findings regarding violence in all types of prostitution.

95% of those in prostitution experienced sexual harassment that would be legally actionable in another job setting.

65% to 95% of those in prostitution were sexually assaulted as children.

70% to 95% were physically assaulted in prostitution

60% to 75% were raped in prostitution

75% of those in prostitution have been homeless at some point in their lives.

85% to 95% of those in prostitution want to escape it, but have no other options for survival.

68% of 854 people in strip club, massage, and street prostitution in 9 countries met criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder or PTSD, a level comparable to victims of state-sponsored torture.

80% to 90% of those in prostitution experience verbal abuse and social contempt which adversely affect them.

(research completed by Melissa Farley PhD, 2004, Prostitution is sexual violence. Psychiatric Times.)

Last year this legislator changed the language in the laws from prostitution to selling or buying sexual relations. While this may have had good intentions it is harmful and frames the issue as though it is a transaction of equal power and there is a relationship and no victim. It is commercial sexual exploitation and should be called what it is, and the judicial focus should be on the buyers. It should be called: the buying of commercial sexually exploitive acts. It is time to stop prosecuting the victims, and law enforcement efforts need to be focused specifically on those that are buying these acts of sexual exploitation. I would ask you today, in the position you hold, to make a difference by becoming educated on the Swedish model, as this is the direction we need to be going.

The Swedish model, enacted in 1999, makes it illegal to buy sex services but not to sell them.

Pimping, facilitating or operating a brothel are also illegal. Sweden understood that gender inequality and sexual subordination could not be fought effectively by assuming a gender symmetry that does not exist. Along with this law, the Swedish government made a significant investment in exit programs for those who wish to leave prostitution to provide comprehensive social services for victims of exploitation, which is essential for a victim-centered, human

rights-based approach to combating trafficking. Other countries to adopt this approach are: Norway, Iceland, France and other countries like South Korea, have adopted Nordic model influenced provisions, while there are strong movements to adopt the Nordic model in Ireland, Denmark and Latvia. [http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Nordic\\_Model\\_EN.pdf](http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Nordic_Model_EN.pdf)

At the very least we need to make it safe for someone in prostitution who is a victim of a crime that they can report that crime without fear of being prosecuted or harassed as well as have the knowledge they will be helped as any other citizen would be. At Veronica's Voice we keep what is known as a "bad trick" list. This is the list we keep in the Safe Center as well as hand out in an attempt to keep women aware of men assaulting prostituted women in Kansas City. Most women report to us and not the police as they do not feel comfortable with going to the police because of either the experiences they have had with law enforcement or the judicial system. Many have had the experience of being re-victimized by the system that should be protecting them. What we at Veronica's Voice see happening with our list is many times the same perpetrator is reported to us by different women. This shows serial offenders targeting these women because they know they can get away with it.

This brings me to the fact and personal belief that prostituted persons are targeted by serial killers and seen as easy prey and not likely to have anyone who will care.

Kansas City: Lorenzo Gilyard, active from 1977-93, killed up to 13 prostituted women and girls;

Kansas City: Robert Berdella, active 1984-87 convicted of killing 6 young homeless men (hustlers);

Kansas City: Terry Blair, active 1982-04, killed up to 7 prostituted women;

Kansas City: Derek Rickardson, 2013 killed 2 prostituted women; defendant described by police as an aspiring serial killer

Washington State: Gary Ridgway also known as “the Green River Killer”; convicted of killing 49 prostituted women and girls. In his own words, *“I picked prostitutes as victims because they were easy to pick up without being noticed. I knew they would not be reported missing right away and might never be reported missing. I picked prostitutes because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught.”*

Veronica’s Voice has a memorial video and although not all the 68 women and girls we honor in it were killed by a serial killer, they were all murdered. We also honor the 16 missing women and girls.

It’s time to start to protect this vulnerable population!

I want to ask that as Kansas moves into requiring men arrested to attend “educational” John Schools that you ensure that any profits made off of John Schools goes back into restorative justice. What I mean by this is that the fines and fees paid for John School by men arrested for using vulnerable adult people in prostitution must go back to the abused. Fines and fees must fund services to help people exit and recover from the abusive, violent system of CSE-commercial sexual exploitation. Keep in mind anyone attempting to exploit someone underage – should not be a candidate for a John School but have other charges.

We need to be careful in our response to keep an accurate, researched view of the problem. Sensationalism has taken over this issue and it is causing harm to real victims who continue to suffer and remain voiceless. . The public is shown images of women and children in chains and while this can occur, it is not the norm. Laws are changed by what the majority looks like

and what this looks like is what it has always looked like “prostitution”. In order to properly identify victims, the public at large, first responders, victim service providers, and law enforcement agencies need to be educated and trained to see these victims for what they are. They are rarely kidnapped from their driveway. They are often lured with false promises and offers of a better life by charismatic men that claim they simply want to help. Psychological manipulation is used first and foremost to trap these victims, and then comes the physical and sexual abuse. We must properly educate society on what this issue really is.

The sensationalism around the issue has caused an inaccurate blending of crimes, so that any sexual crime against a child is viewed as trafficking. This obscures the reality of sex trafficking and commercial exploitation.

The only way we are really going to be able to overcome this atrocity against women is to be realistic about what this is “prostitution” and the real extent of the problem. I have heard so many falsehoods surrounding this issue that is heartbreaking because it keeps the REAL victims invisible!

Trafficking is a prevalent crime that we can dismantle but it must be recognized as organized crime. Most of what I see are the low-hanging fruit (street level pimps) being arrested and given time. People must recognize we are talking about the “Commercial Sex Industry,” a 32 billion dollar a year industry. We must also be educated to recognize the tactics used by organized crime pimps. This is a much harder focus for law enforcement but essential to stopping trafficking. Just one example: Mike Ocello, an active duty police officer in Mehlville MO, his company: VCG Holdings (the publicly traded company that owns the Penthouse Club and 18 other adult nightclubs in 10 states), <http://www.vcgh.com/site/clubs/default.aspx> this company is involved in distributing pornography. He established a donation-based organization

called The Association of Club Executives, or ACE National, and he has created a program called COAST, or club operators against sex trafficking. They are partnered with the Federal Government and he is now speaking at conferences to end child sex trafficking. He himself stated that it costs several million dollars to open just one of these establishments. When the sex industry and the anti-trafficking movement are saying and standing for the same thing, there an obvious problem. They agree that if it's happening to someone underage it is wrong. They agree if it is able to be proved that it is forced, it is wrong. Again this is why we must talk about what it really looks like.

In summary Veronica's Voice has been working on this issue since 2000, with thousands of victims and our experience has led us to believe:

- a.) that all forms of prostitution are inherently violent and a prostituted person is a victim and legal language should reflect that victimization;
- b.) The State of Kansas should recognize this and respond accordingly;
- c.) Men arrested who were attempting to buy a commercial sexually exploitive act with adult women should attend John Schools with the restorative justice model where the monetary fees go to help restore and empower these same adult women;
- d.) We need to be mindful in our response so to avoid accusations of over sensationalism and so we can actually make smart measurable impacts in responding to the problem.
- e.) Recognize that organized crime is at the helm of this problem.