

**Remarks for Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
Testimony: Judiciary Committee Hearing – Human Trafficking: Protecting the Victim  
Tuesday, January 24, 2015**

**Remarks**

Thank you, **Chairman Grassley** and **Ranking Member Leahy**, for inviting me to testify today.

Human trafficking is a crime that affects thousands of young Americans and their families...and Congress's focus on this epidemic is long overdue.

We have a number of proposed bills that would address the law-and-order side of this issue.

These bills would make the people who buy underage victims strictly liable for their crimes...and would make penalties for traffickers much harsher.

But today I want to focus on the other side of human trafficking.

I want to focus on the vulnerabilities that lead to these girls and boys becoming trafficked...and how vulnerable they remain even after they've managed to escape from captivity.

In small towns and big cities, thousands of young Americans are trafficked each year. Every single institution these girls and boys ever relied on...failed to protect them.

Their families failed to protect them...their schools failed to protect them...the foster system failed to protect them...and our laws are failing to protect them.

Last week, in Rochester, New York, the US Attorney there announced the arrest of seven people on trafficking charges.

Their victims were as young as 14 years old.

The US Attorney said that "the victims in many cases were singled out because they were identified as being vulnerable."

We have a responsibility in Congress to end these crimes against our children.

We need better institutions...to protect runaway and homeless youth from stumbling into shelters that will spit them right back out onto the street.

We need a law that would vacate the criminal convictions of trafficking victims...because these girls and boys are not criminals, and they are not prostitutes...

They are victims who deserve a chance to lead a fulfilling life.

We have to protect these young Americans.

I want to close by telling you the story of a girl named Ashley, from right here in Washington.

When Ashley was 12, she ran away from home and lived on the streets.

She went into a foster home...but a trafficker found her and started selling her.

Ashley went out every night, and risked a beating if she didn't take home at least 500 dollars.

When the police finally found her, she was arrested on charges of prostitution and solicitation. She was 13 years old.

For the next six years, Ashley bounced between sexual predators, who continued to traffic her. She ended up in New York City with a violent pimp.

When Ashley was 19, she escaped...and was referred by law enforcement to a nonprofit group called FAIR Girls, which provides housing and 24/7 care to young women survivors of sex trafficking.

Ashley has a bank account now, and some savings, and she enrolled in a community college and is looking for a job.

There are thousands of young Americans whose circumstances are just like Ashley's.

So let's do our job in Congress, and do everything we can to help the victims of human trafficking live fulfilling lives.

Thank you.