

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
On Implementation of the Justice For Victims of Trafficking Act
June 28, 2016**

Today's hearing on the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015 (JVTA) is an important opportunity to examine how this new law has been implemented. We must make sure that the legislation we pass has a meaningful impact – especially when it is supposed to help survivors of the despicable crime of buying and selling human beings. We must provide real solutions to the challenges faced by trafficking survivors and service providers.

We did just that in 2013 when Congress reauthorized the two core Federal laws protecting victims of sexual violence and human trafficking – the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Before passing these laws, we spent countless hours learning about what was working and what needed to be improved in order to best meet the needs of survivors. We wanted to be sure that our legislation made a difference in their lives. I am proud of what we accomplished with the Leahy-Crapo VAWA reauthorization, which included a reauthorization of the TVPA. I look forward to again working alongside survivors and advocates on the upcoming reauthorization of these two landmark laws. That process will be improved by what we learn about the implementation of the JVTA at today's hearing.

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act improves the tools law enforcement has to bring traffickers to justice and encourages states to adopt safe harbor laws to ensure that child victims of human trafficking are treated like survivors, not criminals. The law also aims to increase existing resources for survivors by establishing a Domestic Trafficking Victims' Fund with money raised from a new \$5,000 special assessment imposed on defendants convicted of trafficking crimes. We must ensure that survivors have the resources they need to rebuild their lives with dignity and safety. The Justice Department is here today and we will learn more about the Fund's operation and the resources it has raised through the special assessment.

As we learn about how the JVTA has been implemented to punish traffickers and increase services for survivors, I hope we will also turn our attention to prevention of this crime. We must do more to stop trafficking before it destroys the life of one more young person. That is why Senator Collins and I have authored the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (RHYTPA), which would help prevent vulnerable young people from becoming victims of trafficking by reauthorizing and improving vital programs for homeless and runaway teens. So many of the stories we hear from survivors and service providers start with a homeless teen who was alone and scared with no place to turn and nowhere to sleep. At the Judiciary Committee's hearing on human trafficking last year, we heard from service providers who told us that these youth were especially vulnerable to traffickers. We also heard from a brave trafficking survivor about her experience of being "walking prey" after she ran away from home.

The programs supported by the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (RHYTA) keep kids safe, save lives, and prevent human trafficking in the first place. That means fewer victims and fewer shattered lives. My bill with Senator Collins also includes an

important provision to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. No young person should be turned away from a shelter bed and pushed back on the streets because of who they are. So I was deeply disappointed when RHYTPA failed to pass as an amendment to the JVTa by just four votes. This legislation is too important to the lives of vulnerable young people, and I will keep fighting to get it passed.

It is important that the Committee continue to focus on the critical issue of human trafficking and making sure our laws are as effective as possible to stop this crime and help survivors. The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act has taken an important step to accomplish these goals. I hope the Senate will next turn its efforts to prevent this crime from happening in the first place by taking up and passing the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act.

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