

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

“Human Trafficking in the United States: Protecting the Victim”

February 24, 2015

Questions for the Record from Senator Al Franken

For Ms. Holly Austin Smith

Question 1

In your testimony, you mentioned the diverse experiences of trafficking victims. I’m interested in how we tailor supportive services to best address the needs of survivors.

In Minnesota, there are high rates of trafficking of Native American women and girls. Many of these women and girls have experienced long-term homelessness, poverty, sexual and physical abuse, and interactions with child protective services. Additionally, Native American women have discussed their experiences with racism and the generational trauma that has developed from the targeting of Native Americans since colonialism.

Can you please elaborate on the merits of gearing preventative and rehabilitative services to specific populations? How does cultural sensitivity enhance the effectiveness of services for survivors?

Answer 1

Every survivor has had a different journey before, during, and after exploitation. This means that every victim will have different needs and that prevention efforts must be diverse. The more services and support we have available for victims (and potential victims), the more likely each victim will be successful in recovery (and the more likely we will prevent sex trafficking from happening in the first place). As I state in my book, *Walking Prey: How America’s Youth are Vulnerable to Sex Slavery*, a twelve-year-old girl lured out of foster care by a pimp trafficker who promised romance may have different needs than a seventeen-year-old mother who was blackmailed into submission by a violent gang trafficker. Likewise, an eleven-year-old boy sold for sex by a family member for drugs may have different needs than a fifteen-year-old transgender boy lured into pornography by a man promising friendship and romance. All of these differences must be considered when weighing the options for services. All of these differences must also be considered when creating programs geared toward prevention.

One service that I recommend for any prevention or aftercare program is a mentorship program, especially one that involves local survivors. Models of survivor mentorship are available from My Life My Choice in Boston, Massachusetts. I highly recommend exposing victims to healthy and empowered survivors with whom they can relate. For example, two outspoken survivors from the Native American community are Christine Stark, author of *Nickels: A Tale of*

Dissociation, and Alexandra (Sandi) Pierce, PhD. Not only can survivors like Christine and Sandra offer kinship to victims with similar backgrounds but they can also offer culturally sensitive information to law enforcement and service providers. For aftercare programs unable to connect with local and empowered survivors, I recommend exposing victims and potential victims to diverse survivors through books and other media.

Question 2

LGBTQ youth represent a disproportionate share of the homeless youth population. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has estimated that, while only 3 to 5 percent of youth identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, LGBTQ youth represent 20 to 40 percent of all homeless youth. Based on your testimony, they also seem to represent a disproportionate share of trafficking victims.

How can we better address the unique needs of LGBTQ youth as we work to prevent trafficking and provide services for trafficking victims?

Answer 2

My recommendation would be to consult with a vetted and diverse group of LGBTQ survivors and service providers (i.e., service providers who have a confirmed history of working with this population). Perhaps an advisory council could be created to help refine prevention efforts and victim services. However, I encourage you to keep in mind that oftentimes survivors do not work in the anti-trafficking field full-time, or even part-time. When we seek feedback or participation from survivors, we are often asking them to take unpaid time away from work and family. It's important that we value their insight and time by providing compensation (as a consultant) and full coverage for travel and lodging (whenever travel is necessary).

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

“Human Trafficking in the United States: Protecting the Victim”

February 24, 2015

Questions for the Record from Ranking Member Charles E. Grassley

For Ms. Holly Austin Smith

1. Why is it that victims of sex trafficking reportedly often find it hard to self-identify as victims?

When Americans hear the term *human trafficking*, we often imagine scenarios of human smuggling. Or, we imagine people forced into labor or commercial sex in other countries only. When we consider the idea of human trafficking happening here in the United States, we often think it happens only to foreign nationals. These are misconceptions that I hear on a regular basis from adults and youth across the country. On the other hand, when Americans hear the term *prostitution*, we often immediately think of women who have been stigmatized as having made poor choices. Without effective and informed advocacy and outreach efforts, victims (especially victims of sex trafficking) may not self-identify because they fail to see a connection between their circumstances and the crime of *human trafficking*. They may instead blame themselves and fear judgment from outsiders.

Since sex traffickers often target youth and young adults, we must incorporate education and awareness efforts in middle and high schools. Youth must be educated on (1) the meaning of the term *human trafficking*, (2) the existence of sex trafficking within the United States, and (3) the common tactics of sex traffickers. The first step toward preventing victimization and enabling youth to recognize potential signs of sex trafficking is to educate them on the dynamics of the crime. Furthermore, traffickers often target youth who are more vulnerable or disadvantaged than others. They will use various tactics to befriend and/or romance victims who lack guidance, supervision, and/or community resources. They target youth who are lonely, isolated, learning-disabled, physically or sexually abused, neglected, disenfranchised, or simply young and naïve. Such victims may fail to recognize a relationship as abusive or exploitative due to prior abuse or exploitation.

2. What should law enforcement and other first responders know when encountering potential child victims?

When I speak to law enforcement, I often present on the topic of so-called “willing victims”. A willing victim is someone who is seemingly a willing participant in their own victimization. As Sergeant Byron Fassett of the Dallas Police Department says, if a young person is engaging in commercial sex (with or without force, fraud, or coercion), then it’s likely this “choice” is the result of a long history of abuse, exploitation, and/or lack of resources. Many young people who are forced into or turn to commercial sex have had so many experiences of abuse, exploitation, or neglect that they are unable to recognize certain

relationships or situations as exploitative. They may even view a life in the commercial sex industry as better than a life in which they endured abuse or neglect in their homes or communities. I cover this topic in-depth in my book, *Walking Prey: How America's Youth are Vulnerable to Sex Slavery*.