

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing in opposition to SB 274. As a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation, and a victim's advocate with 17 years of experience supporting survivors of sexual violence and sex-trafficking, I feel that this bill is well intended, but misses the mark. Children should not be responsible for their own escape from a trafficker. While adaptable, resourceful, and resilient, youth often lack the language to frame what they are experiencing in a manner that will screen them as eligible for many services, they lack the knowledge of how to navigate the adult "square" world on their own, they lack the understanding of available social/ medical/ justice/ self-sufficiency resources, and even lack the legal ability to access certain avenues of escape (for example, a minor can't just go out and rent a car to drive to a hotel room that they have rented for themselves, to give themselves a break from their pimp to figure out how they are going to make a new life for themselves from scratch). Additionally youth often lack safe supports, education, and may even be too young to get a job. We know that DHS CHild Welfare lacks the current capacity to intervene as seen in their consistent refusal to even respond let alone take guardianship over teens even in dire life-threatening trafficking-related circumstances. Therefore, if the dependency track and basic-needs services of the state cannot or will not be made available, the only alternative method of intervention for the youth is the criminal justice response and law enforcement must be entrusted with the ability to step in and provide a reasonable method for the youth to escape, given the youth's barriers to doing so on their own/for themselves.

In addition, the following examples come to mind. (These examples have been blinded. The statements given are by adults who have written signed releases to share their statements. In the case of those deceased, no statements are attributed due to lack of ability to garner a release. )

"Survivor #1" was 15 when I met her after a law enforcement sting in which she was picked up on suspicion of prostitution. Detetives concluded, based on the language in her online add, that she likely had a pimp and therefore set up a "date" to contact her and get her to services. She disclosed being trafficked and was held in juvenile detention until placement could be found out of state. While in detention she stated that she "felt safe for the first time she could remember in her life". (I have heard this exact statement by youth upon entering juvenile detention more times than I can remember but it is well into the hundreds).

"Survivor #2" was 14 when I met her after a law enforcement sting in which she was picked up on suspicion of prostitution. Detectives concluded, based on the language in her online add, that she likely had a pimp and therefore set up a "date" to contact her and get her to services. She disclosed being tied up in a bathroom with another victim and sold day in and day out by her trafficker. Once they attempted to escape out the bathroom window so he chained them to the toilet, and wrapped them from head to toe in plastic and then turned the heater on high, in hopes of "cooking them" to death. It did not work and they

both lived. With no other hope of escape, except law enforcement intervention, they continued to be exploited. When we found her she stated, through tears "where were you guys, what took you so long". She was lodged in juvenile detention and we had time to find her a secure in-patient program to help her gain tools to handle her trauma from being trafficked. She is now out of the "life" and safe and disconnected from her trafficker.

"Survivor #3" was arrested for prostitution and while held in jail she was referred to an advocate. She was able to articulate being trafficked, which allowed charges to be dropped, she was placed in a safe long term housing program in another state as a safety precaution. She testified against her trafficker and was able to regain custody of all of her children. She stated that jail was both her rock bottom, and the only time she had been afforded in years to become sober, or to discreetly talk to someone who could help her safety plan. She credits jail as the turning point where she was able to make the leap out of the industry because she didn't have to worry about her safety, or her pimp being able to find her.

"Survivor #4" was picked up in a law enforcement sting in which she was picked up on suspicion of prostitution. Detectives concluded that she had been trafficked and she was held in juvenile detention where she stated it was the first time she had ever felt safe and stated that she didn't want to leave.

"Survivor #5" was picked up on a law enforcement sting in which she was held on suspicion of prostitution. Detectives concluded that she had been trafficked and she was held in juvenile detention while an out of state placement was found for her in an in-patient program. There she was able to get her diploma and begin college. By the time she left the treatment program she had a part time job and had a self-sufficiency plan. She now has her bachelors degree and states that "getting caught up by the police was the moment where I reflected on how my life was going, and I realized, if I didn't get out and take the path they were offering me, I was going to end up dead".

"Victim #6" was never contacted by Law Enforcement for her experiences being trafficked. She was DHS-CW involved however after her 15th birthday they took a "hands off" approach on her case. She was murdered by "regular" trick who had previously harbored her as a minor runaway, when she was 19.

"Victim #7" was never contacted by Law Enforcement for her experiences being trafficked. She was murdered by her pimp when she was 16.

"Victim #8" was found in a sting by Law Enforcement due to her experiences being trafficked, however she was not held and neither was her pimp that night. She had nowhere safe to go and stated that her pimp was her "daddy" so she was released to him. Internet postings showed that she continued to be trafficked by him within the next 24 hours. She went missing and her body has never been found. No one has ever been held accountable for her disappearance.

"Victim #9" was never contacted by Law Enforcement for her experiences being trafficked. She completed suicide when she was 17.

"Victim #10" was never contacted by Law Enforcement for being trafficked. He contracted HIV at 13, while being trafficked out of a club that operated as a front for a brothel. He was found dead at age 16.

"Victim #11" was never contacted by Law Enforcement for her experiences being trafficked. She was trafficked from young adolescence into adulthood and murdered by her pimp at age 23.

Victim #12" was never contact by Law Enforcement for her experiences being trafficked. She was trafficked from young adolescence into adulthood and murdered by her regular trick at 28.

Virtually 100% of the sex trafficking victims whose cases I have personally been exposed to, who are now deceased, either had zero law enforcement intervention in their lives related to their experiences being traffickd, or in the one case one did, no one was detained, and no meaningful intervention took place.

Conversely, after hours of reflection and pouring over notes to jog my memory, I think it safe to say that 100% of the women that I know who are now grown, safe, and no longer trafficked, (other than myself) ALL experienced a law enforcement intervention to disrupt the control their pimp had over them. While that is not a statistical analysis with any measure of control or "validity", It's still noteworthy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Esther Nelson

CEO/ Founder

Safety Compass