

**Testimony of Charla Bansley, State Director
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Before the Joint Judiciary Committee

**LD 461 "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Human
Trafficking Task Force"**

March 7, 2007

Concerned Women for America (CWA) of Maine applauds Rep. Deborah Simpson for introducing LD 461, "An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Human Trafficking Task Force."

The U.S. State Department estimates between 14,000 -17,000 children and women are brought into the United States every year for modern-day slavery. Canadian officials estimate that around 1,500 to 2,200 persons are trafficking through Canada into the U.S. every year, though observers think that these numbers significantly understate the problem.

Anti-pimping laws are already written in Maine code. Currently, compelling a person into prostitution or promoting prostitution from a minor under 18 years old is a Class B crime. LD 461 would strengthen current laws by defining "aggravated human trafficking" as trafficking resulting in the death of the victim or involving a minor under 18 and making it a class A crime.

LD 461 would work with the Victim Compensation Fund to collect damages and restitution. In addition, the bill helps prevent human trafficking through travel agents and matchmaking organizations.

In some cases, our state laws are more effective in prosecuting pimps and trafficking criminals than are the federal laws that require proof of "force, fraud and coercion." These human trafficking laws, such as LD 461, are immensely helpful in targeting the worst of those who victimize girls and women.

While we fully support the task force's recommendations, it will take more than legislation to eradicate human trafficking. It is not enough to pass laws, citizens must be aware of the problem, and the law officials must prosecute when human trafficking is found. Law officials must also prosecute those who purchase other human beings; without the demand of johns there would be no trafficking.

Sex trafficking is a scourge that is little known among most Mainers because it happens under the "radar" of public scrutiny and off the beaten pathways of polite society -- primarily in the sleazy parts of our cities, on the side streets of our towns, in trailers off seldom-traveled rural roads, and in shacks located in isolated areas of Maine's countryside. Sometimes it operates under the guise of health clubs. Such was the case

with the Danish Health Club in Kittery. Where a 14 year old young girl from Massachusetts was being abused by pimps for money and johns for sex.

(This example comes from the USDOJ Report on Activities to Combat Human Trafficking Fiscal Years 2001-2005: United States v. Pallas)

On December 15, 2004, Russell A. Pallas pled guilty in the District of Maine to transporting individuals to engage in prostitution. Pallas was the manager of the Danish Health Club where prostitution activities involving women from Massachusetts and New Hampshire occurred. Pallas was sentenced November 21, 2005, to 10 ½ months imprisonment.

The "health club" operated for 20 years. Pallas, a former police officer for the towns of Candia, Raymond and Meredith, testified under oath that local police had promised to give advance notice if the club was going to be raided by authorities. On June 4, 2004, that promise was broken and the club raided by the FBI, IRS, and State Police.

In 2004, Concerned Women for America was awarded a grant from the State Department to train 15 Mexican leaders about combating sex trafficking in their country.

What we have discovered over the years is that you need more than laws to fight trafficking, we need to recognize that it is happening and learn about its victims who are primarily vulnerable children and women who are preyed upon by very sophisticated networks of evil criminals who are making nearly \$10 billion a year -- much of it used to finance organized crime. The human beings lured into being trafficked end up in prostitution, sweatshops, farms, domestic work or other forms of involuntary servitude. Most are treated brutally and repeatedly degraded. Over half of the victims end up trafficked for sexual exploitation; some are forced to be used by up to 30 men a day. Millions are trafficked within their home countries.

The toll on individuals caught in this tragedy is terrible enough; that toll is compounded by the broader impact -- the human and social toll -- disease, drug addiction, physical and emotional damage, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, social breakdown, loss of educational opportunity, productivity and earning power. Plus, the nature of the crime -- preying on the most vulnerable, the world's poorest and most hopeless children and women -- is unconscionable and despicable. Again, those who purchase another human being are just as guilty as the traffickers.

It is important to note that the fight against sex trafficking heated up six years ago when President Bush established an office in the State Department to address the problem, and the U.S. government got serious about the "three P's"-- prosecution, protection and prevention. We also address the "three R's" of compassion for victims -- rescue, removal and reintegration. For the first time, there is a record of convictions for perpetrators as well as hotlines, shelters and rehabilitation programs for victims.

Last year (FY 2006), the Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorneys' Offices initiated 168 investigations, charged 111 defendants in 32 cases and obtained 98 convictions involving human trafficking.

From FYs 2001-2006, the Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorneys' Offices have:

- Prosecuted 360 defendants compared to 89 defendants charged during the prior six years, representing a more than 300% increase;
- Secured 238 convictions and guilty pleas, a 250% increase from the 67 obtained in the previous six years;
- Opened 639 new investigations, approximately 399% more than the 128 opened in the previous six years.

With more than 266 anti-trafficking programs in over 101 countries (FY 2005 figures), at a cost of nearly \$95 million, the United States is providing training, educational and awareness programs, equipment for law enforcement, shelters, crisis centers, safe houses, counseling and rehabilitation programs.

In January 2006, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) was signed into law, and it contains domestic provisions aimed at decreasing demand for sex trafficking victims. According to the 2006 TIP Report from the State Department, it authorizes \$25 million in block grants by the Attorney General to states and local law enforcement to: investigate and prosecute buyers of commercial sex; educate individuals charged with or attempting to purchase commercial sex; and collaborate with local NGOs who are skilled at providing services to victims.

The United States has also passed the PROTECT Act making it a crime for any person to enter the U.S., or for any citizen to travel abroad, for the purpose of sex tourism involving children. Such crimes can result in 30-year prison terms, and the act has already jailed pedophiles. Our government has committed \$50 million to end sex trafficking and is leading international efforts. According to the Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons in FY 2005 there have been roughly 60 investigations of individuals who traveled abroad to exploit children. Since 2003 there have been nearly 50 sex tourism indictments and 29 convictions.

We have learned much about the problem over the past six years. One tragic lesson we have learned is that our efforts are not always keeping up with the growth of the problem. That is why LD 461 is so important.

Trafficking in persons is a human rights violation that affects every major city in America. The U.S. gets victims through both Canada and Mexico as well as through immigration at major airports. We know that, at the present time, there are 25 distinct Russian organized-crime groups operating in the U.S., with 250 pending investigations targeting Russian gangs in 27 states.¹

- Five people have been accused of planning to traffic two Chinese women to Arkansas.²
- In Pennsylvania, a lawyer was charged with imprisoning two Honduran women that he met through magazine ads.³
- At least five Latvian women were trafficked to Chicago; they were held in slavery-like conditions and forced to strip in nightclubs. The women would earn as much as \$600 per night, but were forced to give all but \$20 to the traffickers.
- The State Attorney General in Ohio reported that in the more than 2,500 youths reported missing in that state; more than 60 percent are considered "endangered" and usually end up as prostitutes.⁴
- The much smaller city Minneapolis has more strip clubs than larger-city Chicago, and the city has at least 200 escort services, including street dwellings called "chicken shacks" where quick prostitution activity is conducted. Social workers report that Korean-run massage parlors and saunas and Vietnamese- and Spanish-speaking sex industries are more underground, but are located even in rural southwestern Minnesota towns. There is known pimp pressure on the migrant farm workers from Mexico and large domestic trafficking rings.
- Both Georgia and Florida are known areas where women trafficked from abroad are set up in brothels and where sex industries are dependent upon trafficked women.
- In early February, 2005, a Michigan couple was indicted for keeping a 14-year-old Cameroonian girl in involuntary servitude. Frequently, such criminals promise the American dream to vulnerable girls and women and then, when the victims are under their control, the perpetrators abuse and degrade them.
- In New Jersey, five teens from Mexico were forced into prostitution after being lured into the U.S. with expressions of love, promises of marriage and a good life in America. Instead, the girls were given false birth certificates, were not allowed to leave the premises, and were abused and forced to work as prostitutes.

Clearly, trafficking in persons is, as President Bush stated at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly in September, 2003, "a special kind of evil in the abuse and exploitation of the most innocent and vulnerable."

Through LD461, the Maine Legislature is leading the way in the United States to increased awareness of the evil phenomenon of modern-day slavery and, through its legislation, is making it possible to bring an end to this crime that is causing so much tragedy for so many vulnerable children and women.

End Notes

1. Barbara Starr, "Former Soviet Union a Playground for Organized Crime: A Gangster's Paradise," *ABC News*, 14 September 1998.
2. Associated Press, 8 July 1998.
3. Associated Press, 16 August 1997.
4. "Danger for Prostitutes Increasing, Most Starting Younger," *Beacon Journal* (Akron, Ohio), 21 September 1997.