



Good afternoon. My name is Tanya Ditty, and I am the state director for Concerned Women for America of Georgia. We would like to thank both the members of the press and concerned citizens of Georgia for coming out today to hear our concerns on S.B. 304 and H.B. 582, bills that would decriminalize prostitution for minors in Georgia. As indicated on our media advisory alert, several other groups are here today to speak out in opposition to the bills.

We at Concerned Women for America (CWA) of Georgia understand that minors found in prostitution are victims of human trafficking, sexual abuse, and exploitation. Often the current pattern of arrest, release, and return to the streets has proven to trap these girls and boys in a cycle of pimp control, drug abuse and criminal activity which is dangerous and difficult to escape.

We stand united with many others who are sickened and outraged by those who seek out and prey upon the young and vulnerable. We stand united with those who work in the trenches to rescue, rehabilitate, and restore those that have been victimized. All of us who struggle to help these children all agree on the need to “do something”, but S.B. 304 and H.B. 582 as written are not the answer.

The proposed laws seek to decriminalize (the legalizing of an illegal act) prostitution for offenders under the age of 16 and under the age of 18 respectively. While we recognize that the boys and girls exploited by prostitution are often trapped in a cycle of pimp control, drug abuse, and criminal activity, there are better ways to help them than this ill-advised legislation.

We believe that decriminalization creates a friendly environment for pimps and traffickers. By tying the hands of police, victims cannot be identified and separated from their handlers. Law enforcement needs these laws to obtain testimony against the exploiters and, most importantly, to help the victims.

Other jurisdictions have proven that there are better alternatives to decriminalization. Upon arrest (they do not have to be prosecuted if arrested), victims can be identified and placed in diversionary programs designed for rescue and rehabilitation. They can also be provided with an affirmative defense to criminal charges. Affirmative defense protects those who are exploited and holds those accountable who break the law. But in all these cases, the arrest is the action that allows for the intervention leading to education or rehabilitation.

Additionally, vigorous law enforcement pursuit of traffickers and johns will make prostitution less profitable and, thereby, make it harder to sustain. Enforcing the laws on the books against johns and pimps should be the focus of law enforcement—without demand, prostitution and trafficking do not exist.

Our laws establish a set of rules of conduct recognized and established by the community. Decriminalization of minors sends the message that the community accepts children in prostitution—it normalizes it. Only pimps, traffickers and johns believe children should be in prostitution, so why make it legal for minors under the age of 16 or under the age of 18?

There is nothing normal about one human being buying access to another, especially in the case of a child being purchased by an adult. The children of Georgia deserve better protection than that provided by Georgia Senate Bill 304 and House Bill 582.

Just this morning we spoke with Senator Untermyer welcome the opportunity to work with her on crafting new language that does not include the decriminalization of prostitution. CWA desires to see the current bills pulled or completely gutted and started anew. Our goal is the same: rescue and rehabilitate those caught in sex trafficking but without decriminalizing prostitution.

Thank you.