



Crisis Shelter of Lawrence County
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CRISISHELTER.ORG

*We give them shelter... You make it possible**

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The Crisis Shelter of Lawrence County empowers and advocates for those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault and other violent crimes. We inspire and educate citizens to create safer communities and break the cycle of violence.



November 13, 2017

Hon. Ron Marsico
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
4401 Linglestown Road, Suite B
Harrisburg, PA 17112

Re: Senate Bill 554, Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children

Dear Chairman Marsico:

On behalf of the County of Lawrence, specifically the Lawrence County Human Trafficking Task Force and Community Coalition, I write this letter to put forth my support of Senate Bill 554, Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children.

Children who are commercially sexually exploited are victims of a horrific crime that leaves them traumatized and vulnerable to further victimization. In Pennsylvania, these same children are in jeopardy of being prosecuted for committing a crime when, in fact, they are the victims. When children are in their most helpless and defenseless state, they need to be offered treatment to combat the extensive psychological and physical trauma they have endured, a safe respite, and rehabilitation to break the cycle of violence they have experienced. Instead, children in Pennsylvania are at risk for being treated as both a victim of child abuse and criminal defendant. Morally and legally, this does not make sense and requires legislative reform.

A child that performs commercial sex acts is a child that is being prostituted, not a child prostitute. Our current laws contradict each other when we arrest and prosecute a child under the age of 18 with the adult crime of performing commercial sex. Our law needs to be strengthened to instead protect these child victims in order to allow prosecutors the time and resources to go after the true criminals, the people exploiting these children.

Senate Bill 554 certifies that children who are commercially sexually exploited will receive the services that they need for healing and rehabilitation rather than being treated as criminals. Now is the time that Pennsylvania needs to offer improved protections to child sex trafficking victims in conjunction with twenty-one other states and the District of Columbia.

Not only does Senate Bill 554 include protection and the means to fund services for commercially sexually exploited children, it also includes the directive to require law enforcement to receive training on identifying and responding to commercial sexual exploitation. By raising public awareness on the issue, we would also be bringing the demand for commercial sex out of the shadows. The more people that recognize the existence of the issue in our communities, the more that will be able to identify and report suspicious activity.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



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Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 554. As a victims services provider, we are prepared to take on the challenges of treating and educating commercially exploited children to decrease the overall recidivism in the cycle of violence. These children are our future and this bill could make a huge difference in their lives and the lives of future generations. I am hopeful that you will support this bill, and that you will encourage the House Judiciary committee to do the same.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deborah Hennon".

Deborah Hennon
Executive Director

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE