



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Legislature Urged to Help Child Victims of Sex Trafficking

Priorities identified for protecting children

Minneapolis, MN—02/15/13— The Advocates for Human Rights, a Minnesota non-profit organization in its 30th year working locally and globally to promote human rights, today released *Safe Harbor: Fulfilling Minnesota's Promise to Protect Sexually Exploited Youth*, a report that, in part, details priority measures required to help child victims of sex trafficking in Minnesota.

There is no system currently in place in Minnesota to appropriately address the needs of child victims of sex-trafficking.

The Advocates' report comes on the heels of landmark proposed legislation, referred to as the "No Wrong Door Implementation Legislation," now before the Minnesota legislature to help sex-trafficked children. The report will be used to demonstrate to legislators and others the urgency for the bill's victim-centered approach.

Two priorities must be met to ensure that Minnesota is prepared to respond to the needs of sexually exploited youth, according to The Advocates. First, comprehensive, victim-centered support services and housing must be funded and implemented immediately. Second, all children under the age of 18 need to be covered by the protections promised in the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Act (Safe Harbor 2011 Act), a Minnesota law enacted in 2011 set to go into full effect in 2014. The Safe Harbor 2011 Act was a first step in protecting juvenile victims of sex trafficking.

The Advocates' report analyzes the Safe Harbor 2011 Act, as well as the comprehensive approach to the Act developed by a coalition of stakeholders, working in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and presented in a report to the legislature in January. The Safe Harbor Act mandated that the Department of Public Safety convene a working group, which included The Advocates, to devise a comprehensive, victim-centered approach.

The No Wrong Door legislation results from the group's efforts. It expands the Safe Harbor Act with an appropriate and effective safety net. The legislation contains a \$13.5 million appropriation to fund the measures.

"Funding and implementation of No Wrong Door's recommendations are essential to ensuring that Minnesota will be able to meet the needs of sexually exploited children and children at risk of sexual exploitation," states The Advocates.

The requested appropriation will fund services needed by sex trafficked youth, including safe housing, trauma treatment, and medical and mental health care. In addition, funds will be dedicated to training law enforcement and other front-line personnel, such as nonprofit organizations serving homeless youth. In addition, The Advocates explains the need for amending the Safe Harbor 2011 Act to extend its protections to 16- and 17-year-old youth

Sex trafficking is a violent and predatory crime against children to which they can never consent. Treating sexually exploited children of any age as criminals and leveling delinquency charges against them interferes with their attempts ". . . to escape trafficking, find help, or otherwise deal with the trauma inflicted by being trafficked," according to The Advocates.

Rather, treating exploited children as victims of a crime “. . . builds their trust and indicates to children that they’re not at fault for being abused. It also reduces victim contact with juvenile offenders; eliminates stigmatizing records; provides assistance; and sets them on a path to recovery,” reports The Advocates.

The No Wrong Door legislation also makes fiscal sense, explains The Advocates. Research reveals that for every \$1 of public cost, early intervention yields \$34 in benefit, according to a cost benefit analysis conducted in 2012 for the Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center by Indiana State University and the University of Minnesota. A grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation funded the project.

Minnesota’s Safe Harbor 2011 Act, driven by The Advocates and other partners, reflects a sea change in how sexually exploited youth are treated in Minnesota. The 2011 law defined for the first time “sexually exploited youth” and ensured that children 15 years and younger who are sexually exploited or at risk of exploitation are treated as victims under state law, not as criminals.

Holding up a human rights’ lens, The Advocates evaluated the state’s response according to international standards and federal laws, and it identifies circumstances in which the state is or is not yet meeting these standards.

“Sex trafficking is recognized as a human rights violation and is condemned throughout the international human rights community,” according to The Advocates. “Governments, including the United States and, by extension, the state of Minnesota, have committed to combat sex trafficking through a number of international treaties, including protocols specifically addressing trafficking. These instruments set forth the government’s obligation to increase efforts to prosecute perpetrators, protect victims, and prevent future trafficking.”

“We all need to be concerned about sex trafficking, no matter where we live in Minnesota,” says Michele Garnett McKenzie, The Advocates’ advocacy director and a member of the group that developed No Wrong Door’s victim-centered response. “Our work illustrates that sex trafficking is not new to Minnesota nor is it confined to the Twin Cities metropolitan area; it affects communities throughout the state.”

Safe Harbor: Fulfilling Minnesota’s Promise to Protect Sexually Exploited Youth:

1. *Safe Harbor: Fulfilling Minnesota’s Promise to Protect Sexually Exploited Youth*, 2013, The Advocates for Human Rights: http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Issues_Affecting_Women880.html
2. No Wrong Door 2013 Safe Harbor Implementation, HF 485: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H0485.0.html&session=1s88>
3. No Wrong Door 2013 Safe Harbor Implementation, SF 384: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bin/bldbill.php?bill=S0384.0.html&session=1s88>
4. Information about the Safe Harbor 2011 Act: http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/safe_harbors_initiative_2.html
5. Sex Trafficking Needs Assessment for the State of Minnesota, 2008, The Advocates for Human Rights: http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/report_final.10.13.08.pdf

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The Advocates for Human Rights, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minneapolis, is dedicated to the promotion of internationally-recognized human rights. To learn more visit theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.