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Ramsey County Board hears testimony, pledges action around issue of sex trafficking of children

Minneapolis, MN (September 11, 2012) - The Advocates for Human Rights took part in a Ramsey County Board workshop today to address the issue of child sex trafficking. During a two hour briefing session, Board members heard testimony from advocacy agencies, prosecutors and a 9-1-1 call from a victim of sex trafficking in St. Paul. The Ramsey County Board pledged to engage their peers across the state to ultimately fulfill the commitment of the Safe Harbor law in Minnesota.

Minnesota law defines children found to be “engaging in prostitution” as victims of sex trafficking and as delinquents. On July 20, 2011, Minnesota passed into law a public safety bill that includes protections for commercially sexually exploited children and clarifies that sexually exploited children are crime victims, not criminals. Known as the Safe Harbor law, the provisions go into effect in 2014.

The Advocates’ staff attorney Beatriz Menanteau told the Board that the average age of entry into prostitution is 13. After that, prostituted women and girls have an average life expectancy of 7 years. Noting that housing and supportive services are essential to protecting sexually exploited youth, Breaking Free Executive Director Vednita Carter said, “Too often, trafficked children are being kept hidden from society with no way out.” She stressed, “We need a safe place for them to heal.”

“We cannot just talk about this issue and expect to see real change,” said Ramsey County Board Chair Rafael Ortega. “Ramsey County is committed to elevating the model of victim-centered, cross agency approach that we heard about today to the state level where we can better focus on real outcomes and funding for these children.” Said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi, “We applaud the vision and commitment of the Ramsey County Board to take this issue to the next level.”

“Ramsey County has been a leader in combating human trafficking and developing innovative responses to the needs of victims,” said Michele Garnett McKenzie, Advocacy Director of The Advocates for Human Rights. “Their leadership will be essential as Minnesota implements the victim-centered model envisioned by the 2011 Safe Harbor law.”

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The Advocates for Human Rights, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is dedicated to the impartial promotion and protection of internationally-recognized human rights. The Advocates has received international recognition for a broad range of innovative human rights programs and holds Special Consultative Status with the United Nations. To learn more about The Advocates’ local, national, and international work, visit theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.