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Advocates Welcome Signing of Law Protecting Children from Sexual Exploitation

Minneapolis (July 20, 2011) – The Advocates for Human Rights and The Family Partnership welcome today's enactment of a new approach to protecting children from sexual exploitation. As part of the negotiated budget agreement relating to public safety, Governor Dayton today signed into law provisions which take significant steps toward building a victim-centered model for protecting children exploited through prostitution.

The measure, introduced earlier this year by a bi-partisan group of legislators, clarifies that sexually exploited children are crime victims, not criminals. "It took an unprecedented show of cooperation between service providers, advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, and survivors to make this happen. It also took a strong bi-partisan legislative effort in a highly divided session. We're tremendously excited to see everyone come together to protect commercially sexually exploited children in our state," says Jeff Bauer, Director of Public Policy for The Family Partnership.

"While Minnesota's best practices have moved away from prosecuting children exploited through prostitution," says Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates for Human Rights, "until today Minnesota's law has failed to keep up. We are extremely happy that, as of today, Minnesota law recognizes that these children are victims, not criminals." The sexual exploitation of children is a problem of growing urgency. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children conservatively estimates that 100,000 children are exploited each year for prostitution in the United States. The average age of a child lured into sexual exploitation is between 11 and 14 years.

Says Ramsey County Attorney John J. Choi, "The new law will have the positive impact of changing law enforcement's response to combating the growing problem of children being trafficked in our state. That change will be entirely focused on helping children escape their traffickers through effective interventions and more appropriately focusing enforcement on trafficking and those who contribute to the demand as we have already done in Ramsey County."

"The Duluth Trafficking Task Force welcomes the passing of the Safe Harbor Bill. We strongly believe that this will help both the service providers and criminal justice system to coordinate their responses in a more structured fashion. The Task Force looks forward to bridging any gaps existing within the systems and agencies providing services so that the victims of sexual exploitation under the age of 16 are treated as victims and not criminals," says Shunu Shrestha, coordinator of the task force. The innovative approach ensures that children exploited through prostitution will not be subject to criminal charges or delinquency proceedings and explicitly includes sexually exploited youth and juvenile sex trafficking victims within the definition of children in need of protection and services. The legislation also will help Minnesota take steps statewide to providing services for children who are victims of sexual exploitation.

More information about the legislation and about the issue of sexual exploitation of children can be found at www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/safe_harbors.html.

The Advocates for Human Rights is a volunteer-based non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of internationally recognized human rights.

The Family Partnership is a non-profit organization dedicated to building strong families, vital communities and capable children.