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Michele Garnett McKenzie
Advocacy Director
The Advocates for Human Rights
612-341-3302 x117
mmckenzie@advrights.org

Jeff Bauer
Director of Community & Systems Change
The Family Partnership
612-695-6777
jbauer@thefamilypartnership.org

Advocates Welcome Announcement of New Approach to Protecting Children from Sexual Exploitation

Minneapolis (February 25, 2011) – The Advocates for Human Rights and The Family Partnership welcome today's announcement by county attorneys and law enforcement of a new approach to protecting children from sexual exploitation. Ramsey County Attorney John Choi, joined by an array of other county attorneys, law enforcement, and victims of sexual exploitation, announced that children who had been exploited through prostitution would be treated as crime victims rather than as juvenile delinquents under this new approach.

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. A recent study found that 124 girls were exploited for prostitution in Minnesota in August 2010, an increase of 55% over February 2010.

H.F. 556, introduced by Representative Steve Smith and a bi-partisan group of seventeen co-authors, clarifies that sexually exploited children are crime victims, not criminals. The bill seeks to end the contradiction about how to treat sexually exploited youth under Minnesota law, which current classifies these children both as in need of protection and as delinquents.

This legislation ensures that sexually exploited youth 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.