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

Minneapolis (May 5, 2011) – The Advocates for Human Rights and The Family Partnership welcome today's announcement by Northeast Minnesota county attorneys and law enforcement of a new approach to protecting children from sexual exploitation. St. Louis County Attorney Mark Rubin, joined by Duluth Mayor Don Ness and an array of prosecutors, law enforcement, service providers, and victims of sexual exploitation, announced that children who have 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 12 and 14 years. According to the FBI, she is likely to live only 5 to 7 more years and to be forced to have sex with well over 2,000 men each year.

The announcement today mirrors legislation currently pending before the Minnesota Legislature. H.F. 556, introduced by Representative Steve Smith and a bi-partisan group of twenty-four co-authors, and its companion legislation S.F. 1385, authored by Senator Sandy Pappas, Senator John Marty, and Senator Ron Latz, which 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 currently 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.