



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
EIGHTEENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

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**Testimony Regarding SB 61
Submitted by Marc Bennett, District Attorney, Eighteenth Judicial District**

Honorable Chairman King and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding Senate Bill 61. My involvement in the fight against human trafficking in this state began in 2006 when detectives with the Wichita Police Department assigned to the Exploited and Missing Child Unit brought a case to my attention involving a teenage girl from Wichita who had been sold for sex in Kansas City. Later that year, I filed the first trafficking case in Kansas, State v. Marlin Williams, against a man who picked up a fifteen (15) year old child in Wichita and drove her to Dallas where she was sold on the street for sex. Williams was convicted at trial and sentenced to the Kansas Department of Corrections, completing the first successful prosecution under the new Trafficking statute.

Since that time, we have prosecuted a man from Saline County, Kansas who ran a house of prostitution in Wichita; a pimp from Wichita and the 50+ year old john to whom he sold a thirteen (13) year old child for sex on three separate occasions; the pimp and john of a fifteen (15) year old child; an eighteen (18) year old pimp from Wichita who brought a fifteen (15) year old girl from Atlanta, Georgia to Wichita to be sold for sex; a mother who sold her eight (8) year old to a man for sex in exchange for alcohol and cigarettes; and finally, a man who had two children – sisters under the age of twelve (12) – brought to Wichita from Kansas City by their mother in order that he could sexually assault her children on numerous occasions. Sadly, the list does not end there.

This tragic litany has taught us several things. First, that the children subjected to these

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Attachment: 5

unspeakable acts are affected in a profound and lasting way. In the short term, they tend to run from placement – whether placed in the home or out – time and time again. In all but three (3) cases I have worked the victim has run from placement at least once. And the problems don't go away. Today's victim becomes tomorrow's adult caught-up in the sex trade as an adult “prostitute” saddled with a stigma that effectively places her outside the attention of society. Second, these are not easy cases to detect, to investigate or to prosecute. An environment of silence, fear and shame keep the acts and the victims and witnesses in the shadows. Those few officers who come across these cases anecdotally are often ill-equipped to adequately address very specific and difficult issues these victims and these cases present.

The legislation proposed in SB 61 goes a long way to address these issues. The training component alone would help ensure law enforcement across the state is exposed to the issues attendant to these cases. Also integral to the legislation is the Specialized Child in Need of Care proceedings for the child victims and staff secure facilities to address the often chronic – and dangerous – running these children engage in. The effort to establish a new crime of commercial sexual exploitation rather than “prostitution” and to increase penalties for these crimes, especially those effecting children over the age of fourteen (14) sends a powerful message to both the victims and purveyors of the sex industry.

While much more can be said, the effort put into vetting this proposed legislation produced a bill that stands to make a positive change to the landscape of trafficking in Kansas.

Respectfully submitted,

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