

Thank you State Representative O'Connor and other Assembly Members for the opportunity to share with you.

My name is Debbie Lassiter and I am the Executive Director where we work with women rebuilding their lives after trauma. We have a focus on justice involved women and human trafficking survivors. Our clients are 18 and over. I am very honored to share my perspective and experience in the area of sex trafficking specifically involving adult female victims.

- **Awareness** has had a huge impact. There are many organizations in Wisconsin providing awareness. Thanks to these efforts schools, parents, law enforcement, churches, hospitals etc are aware that human trafficking exists. More people with the lived experience of human trafficking are identifying, reporting and escaping or leaving the life. The list goes on however we are still coming in contact with communities that believe they are immune. In order to increase the attention given to human trafficking I believe we should emphasize that it is a people problem. We cannot isolate it to any certain ethnic background or socioeconomic status. In my opinion we leave a way for the traffickers to easily obtain more victims. Individuals that are in denial have their guards completely down making them easy prey. We show them everywhere that they are somehow immune, so they don't educate themselves or put safety measures in place. Graphics of only certain types of victims or traffickers do a disservice. By the same token in some communities, it is so normalized that it is hardly viewed as a crime. In some areas it is even expected and some people with the lived experience of human trafficking believe that it is an approved way to make a living. They are completely oblivious to the lasting emotional and mental impact that "the life" will bring.
- **Psychological damage** is largely overlooked and written off. I am not a mental health professional, but I have worked closely with mental health professionals. We don't view individuals with the lived experience of human trafficking the same way we do other mental health issues. If a person is a counselor, psychotherapist, or psychiatrist with a desire to work with certain populations additional training is required. For example in 2020 substance abuse counselors needed to obtain 360 hours of specialized education in substance use disorders through a state pre-approved program to be certified as a substance abuse counselor. A marriage and family therapist requires a graduate degree from a regionally accredited school. The degree must be in marriage and family therapy or something "substantially equivalent." Some organizations require the mental health professional to have "experience working with" this population but I have not seen any formal certification or specialized training needed to provide the service. As a result, I have seen many survivors unintentionally harmed by individuals providing services. It is frightening. These fragile human beings are often re-victimized which leads them to shy away from assistance of any kind. Along with a trained mental health profession some services that we have found helpful in addressing the psychological damage caused by human trafficking are:
 - **Heartmath**
 - **Ending The Game**
 - **Unlocking The Wounded Heart**

- **Input and assistance from lived experience** is one of our most valuable tools in providing support for those that have experience human trafficking. This isn't always in the form of telling their story which often borders on voyeurism. Many of the women we work with have "the hero complex" They want to help. They are very talented, offering great insight on creating programs, providing graphic content or simply helping others. We have peer to peer opportunities in other fields. In my opinion we need a similar program for those with the lived experience of human trafficking. Maintaining employment can be difficult due to the challenges of daily living. In my opinion it would be great if we had a way for them to achieve this certification and contract the service enabling them to earn a living. We have developed this program and would love the opportunity to see it funded and to put a pilot group of women through it.
- **Employment** remains a problem due to the challenges and disarray of their lives. The skillset of how to manage or even be part of a family is something they in many cases have been denied. Distorted forms of family life while being trafficked have left them completely confused as to what it means to be in a family. Running a household, being a mother, etc. There are programs that address these concerns but without some sort of training regarding human trafficking the participants usually fail.
- **Training** is imperative if you plan to work with individuals with the lived experience of human trafficking. We require staff to be trained to work with so many other populations but somehow, we missed this one. During in-service training for staff I believe awareness regarding human trafficking should be included. This would help identify potential victims as well as provide guidance regarding steps to take in various situations. People don't report or take action because they don't know what to do. During onboarding or orientation human trafficking should be covered because it crosses all walks of life.
- **Loved ones** Often overlooked are the parents and loved ones of the person with the lived experience of human trafficking. Their lives are torn apart when they hear about what is happening, could happen or has happened to their loved one. We give them material things which is fine because they need them also. However, they really need to understand what is happening. A successful program we are using that has helped families and loved ones all of the world is **Through The Eyes of a Parent**. It is a trademark service, the response and evaluations show us that it is working. Some of the participants have been able to welcome their person home and watched as they have healed and moved forward in their lives. Some are still out there but the family knows how to interact with them in a way that does not send them running back to their trafficker.
- **Terminology** We spend a lot of time wondering what to call people. I asked them. Individuals with the lived experience of human trafficking vary in their reactions to terminology:
 - Survivor or Thriver
 - Victim

I've watched as people have almost berated survivors because they referred to themselves as victims instead of thrivers or overcomers. What they've told me is if you're not sure – just ask them how would you like to be identified, introduced or addressed? Most of the time they

aren't as concerned about the labels folks want to put on them. They are concerned about how you treat them. Respect, compassion, empathy, honesty, fairness these are the things that matter.

- **Prevention** – One of our most successful programs is HEMAD. Human trafficking Educators working with Men and boys to stand Against the Demand gives men the opportunity to take a visible stand against human trafficking. They are also encouraged to have other men join. To date over 65,000 men in 11 states and 3 countries have participated in taking a stand. More funding for these types of programs could prove very beneficial. As men become aware of the role they play in contributing to human trafficking in the commercial sex trade many of them were affected. They discontinued certain behaviors and encouraged others to join them.
- **Daily Challenges** – funding for childcare, car repairs and assistance with traffic violations. Some of these things may seem outrageous. These are things that can make the difference between the person with lived experience learning to move forward or deciding it is easier to go backwards. It would be great to see some categories in our grants that would cover these areas. They would need some very clear guidelines and limitations but could prove very beneficial.
- **Reimbursement grants** are often challenging for smaller organizations. Our cash flow can be tied up for extended periods of time, which directly affects our ability to help our clients. It would be great if there was a way that some portion of the grant could be given up front to remedy this. Sometimes we need to get a person out of town and if the cash flow from the grant isn't readily available it could cause problems or a delay in being able to assist.
- **Dissociative Identity Disorder** – a large percentage of the women we work with have parts. Without training they are often mistreated or accused of being untruthful. An assessment by a trained professional will often reveal this disorder. Upon diagnosis the agency, employer, etc that is working with the individual should receive some sort of training to avoid uncomfortable situations.
- **Statistics** – I understand that we need some form of tracking to help validate the problem. The nature of working with individuals with the lived experience of human trafficking cannot be so easily measured. The number of individuals served should not be more important than the quality and effectiveness of the services. We have worked with some of our clients for over 6 years. That client still only counts as 1. The strides they are making, and the layers of improvement are overshadowed because of the numbers reported in the statistics. We need a better way to measure the effectiveness of an organization.

Thank you so much for your time and attentiveness.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S HORIZONS

Advocating for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence

JENNIFER M. PAINE TESTIMONY SUMMARY

You don't understand - My dad sold me. I have been going from place to place my whole life. This statement could have been from the old slavery era. But it is not. It is from a client in 2023, sitting in an office with Gwen and me, describing how she ended up at our shelter. Exhausted. Broken. And looking for help. I will call her Lynn to protect her confidentiality. Lynn sat with us holding a plate of chicken she managed to find at a donation table outside, shifting from side to side to relieve the pain in her legs from injuries she sustained being brutally raped on a car a few days prior. She described, in detail, being sold by her father, a notorious pimp in Chicago, to her uncle, just barely a teenager, and spending 30 years of her life going up and down the I-94 corridor as a sex worker. She told us about her children and her grandchildren and losing contact with them. She told us about her goals to get stable housing. She told us about her inability to pay for basic medical care, her inability to find a therapist willing to work with her, her distrust of all men. I sat there stunned and searching for ways to help her. It was like something out of a movie.

Except - it was not. Lynn's story is not a one-off from a client with unique circumstances who happened to come to Horizons. For us, this is an every day, every single day of the year, client story. In the last week, we have had 3 calls from trafficked victims looking for help.

My name is Jennifer Paine. I am the executive director for Horizons. Prior to coming to Horizons, I sat on the board for IPV nonprofits in Michigan, and I litigated cases for free for IPV victims and their children. Horizons is the oldest IPV shelter and full services provider in Wisconsin. We have been doing this work since 1968 underground, by two women, and since 1976 as an incorporated nonprofit. We are always at capacity in our shelter - and we provide hotels for incoming clients and never turn them away. Our numbers have skyrocketed in the last year. And it keeps going.

Horizons mission is to provide support, shelter, advocacy, education, training, and healing services to victims of sexual and domestic abuse, their families, their children (who are often primary or secondary victims), and the community. We envision communities fully engaged to provide safety and to give voice to all affected by domestic abuse and sexual assault, while creating the social change necessary to address its root causes. Our mission is achievable through survivor-centered work that includes strategic partnerships and collaboration. As advocates for social justice, we embrace the voices of

diverse communities. We will consider any non-violent strategy that is consistent with our mission to prevent and eliminate domestic abuse and sexual abuse.

Victims of domestic and sexual violence are often unfamiliar with advocacy services. Community-based advocates, such as those at WCH, offer free and confidential supportive services. These include systems advocacy (assistance with the legal process, medical care, reporting to law enforcement), one-on-one advocacy, group support, crisis intervention, referrals to our 24/7 emergency shelter, and information and referrals to community resources. An advocate's role is to listen to victims, provide unbiased information and options about the different courses of action available, and to support the victim's choices. Participation in the criminal justice process, filing a law enforcement report, and/or leaving one's abuser is not required in order to access advocacy services.

Horizons also provides mental health treatment and social services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and their families. This includes: accompaniment to medical appointments; free therapy; support groups; prevention courses, also known as batterer intervention classes; and coordination of benefits, such as food assistance.

Horizons continues to provide emergency shelter, its first service, and has expanded housing services to include transitional, subsidizing housing, hotel vouchers, and relocation assistance.

Horizons provides outreach and training to the community often. This includes trainings to law enforcement, hospitals, and other social service agencies; inservices and support groups to schools and churches; and outreach for events like Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Sexual Assault Awareness Month; Human Trafficking Awareness Month; and Teen Dating Awareness Month.

Nationwide and here in Wisconsin, rates of IPV overall are increasing. In 2023, our trafficked client number in particular went up by three times. Our overall client load increased by 38% --while our budget remained the same, and for 2024 is estimated to go down by 40.2%. More on that later.

The question is, WHY?

We know why traffickers traffic - bad people do bad things. A lot of times for money. Because they can. Spending time analyzing the *why* for traffickers is wasting time.

The focus needs to be on *what our community is not doing that facilitates trafficking*. This is what Lynn meant sitting in our office this year. While anyone can be victimized, from our experience on the frontlines as a shelter and victim services provider, there are common factors that make victims more likely to be trafficked. They are:

Lack of affordable housing

Lack of good wages

Lack of affordable childcare during normal work hours

Lack of affordable food

Lack of affordable medical care

Lack of therapy

Lack of affordable treatment for substance abuse, a co-occurring abuse tactic

As examples:

Housing: Between 2012 and 2023, the Wisconsin median home sale price jumped by more than 150%, according to a report from the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Wages: Minimum wage has remained \$7.25/hour since 2018 according to the US Labor Law Center.

Childcare: According to a report by the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the average annual cost of Child Care for a 4-year-old in Milwaukee County is \$12,142, while the cost for an infant is \$16,236. Both are higher than the national average. A person making minimum wage fulltime makes less than the average cost of childcare.

Food: According to the USDA in October 2023, all food prices are predicted to increase 5.8 percent, with a prediction interval of 5.5 to 6.1 percent. Medical Care

In other words, lacking the necessities of life makes victims more vulnerable to trafficking. And the lack of affordability necessities makes it even harder for them to get out.

Despite this, the DOJ is cutting spending for programs like ours starting October 2024. I minimum reduction is 40.2%. And despite a surplus in our state budget of over \$4 billion, none of our requested increase in funding for IPV programs passed.

For example, earlier this year, the DOJ requested a modest increase from \$2 million to \$9 million for sexual assault victim services programming, commonly calls SAVS, where most of the funding for trafficked victims comes. Governor Evers included an increase to \$7 million in his proposed budget. It did not pass. This means, we have \$2 million for the entire state's programming. Despite rapidly increasing SA/trafficking client numbers.

This means, the DOJ will only be able to award \$13 million per year beginning October 2024. This will be the next competitive VOCA cycle for programs. That will be a 3-year grant cycle.

- Currently the DOJ awards \$44.5 million per year, spread amongst 135 agencies.
- That is a 70% reduction in the amount DOJ will be awarding for VOCA beginning on 10/1/24.
- DOJ is expecting they will have to have a cap of \$250k on grant awards for programs beginning on 10/1/24. Around half of all current VOCA recipients are above that cap amount of \$250k.
- The DOJ will fund 52 agencies across WI (as opposed to 135 currently).
- VOCA is formula-based funding, meaning we can't simply ask for more VOCA funding at the federal level. Sexual assault and Domestic Abuse Services Funding

o The Sexual Assault Victim Services (SAVS) Grant Program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ), is the only state program that funds sexual violence prevention initiatives and direct services for survivors and their families. The DV services program administered through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the only state program that funds domestic violence prevention initiatives and direct services for survivors and families. o SAVS is currently funded at \$2.235 million annually, DV services are currently funded at \$12.4 million annually. Those funding levels have been relatively static for the past decade.

o The static nature of funding has been a barrier to expanding culturally specific programs, who are providing services to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) survivors, often without adequate funding. o Even at existing levels, SAVS and DV Services funding do not meet the needs of survivors in Wisconsin. With the expected reductions in VOCA funding, now is the time for Wisconsin to make an investment in sexual and domestic violence services and prevention. o Increases for both DV and SA funding were included in the Governors 23/25 executive budget. Unfortunately, those increases were removed in the final budget adopted by the legislature. Our ask: Please coauthor/cosponsor legislation that will increase funding for sexual assault and domestic violence services at \$14 million for Fiscal Year 23 and \$36 million for Fiscal Year 24.

Why that dollar amount?

o 7 million increase per year for SAVS for the current biennium (as requested by DOJ)

o 7 million increase per year for DV funding for the current biennium (requested in Gov. Budget)

o 22 million for fiscal year 24 (estimated impact of the VOCA cuts on DV/SA programs)

It should surprise no one that clients like Lynn come to us exhausted. We are exhausted, too. And the clients will not stop coming. We need funding to help them.

If there is a single takeaway we want you to have today, it is this: if we do not properly fund programs to treat victims, we will fail them, and that burden will fall on the entire state. Please let us help victims like Lynn.



Funding Talking Points

Prevalence of Sexual Violence

- Sexual violence is a significant problem. In Wisconsin:
 - 440,000 women have experienced rape in their lifetime (**1 in 5**)
 - 787,000 women have experienced contact sexual violence (**1 in 3**)
 - 404,000 men have experienced contact sexual violence (**1 in 6**)

Prevalence of Domestic Violence

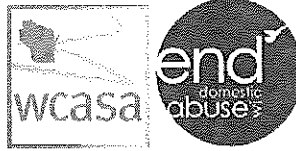
- In 2022, **96** individuals died in Wisconsin due to domestic violence at a rate of approximately **one** death every **3.8 days**.
- **1** in every **6** domestic violence homicides in the United States happens in Wisconsin.
- The annual economic cost of domestic violence in Wisconsin is estimated at **\$657 million**.

Overview of SA/DV Victim Services Funding in Wisconsin

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds victim service providers across Wisconsin; services provided under this program include safety planning, community service referrals, counseling, crisis intervention and legal advocacy.

Programs are expecting devastating VOCA cuts beginning in October 2024.

VOCA Funding Levels				
Federal Fiscal Year Award	Award Amount	5% Administrative Funds	Amount of Admin Funds Used by OCVS	Award Period
2017	\$32,661,004	\$1,633,050	\$1,044,362	10/1/2016 – 9/30/2020
2018	\$58,568,642	\$2,928,427	\$2,023,310	10/1/2017 – 9/30/2022
2019	\$39,619,715	\$1,980,985	TBD	10/1/2018 – 9/30/2023
2020	\$29,294,541	\$1,484,727	TBD	10/1/2019 – 9/30/2024
2021	\$18,258,383	\$912,919	TBD	10/1/2020 – 9/30/2024
2022	\$25,235,262	\$1,261,763	TBD	10/1/2021 – 9/30/2025
2023	\$23,643,268	\$1,182,163	TBD	10/1/2022 – 9/30/2026
2024	Projected Award Amount: Approx \$13,950,000	\$697,500	TBD	10/1/2023 – 9/30/2027
https://www.doj.state.wi.us/				



- Based on this news, the DOJ will only be able to award **\$13 million** per year beginning 10/24. This will be the next competitive VOCA cycle for programs. That will be a 3-year grant cycle.
- Currently the DOJ awards **\$44.5 million** per year, spread amongst **135** agencies.
- That is a **70% reduction** in the amount DOJ will be awarding for VOCA beginning on 10/1/24.
- DOJ is expecting they will have to have a cap of **\$250k** on grant awards for programs beginning on 10/1/24. Around **half** of all current VOCA recipients are above that cap amount of \$250k.
- The DOJ will fund **52** agencies across WI (as opposed to **135** currently).
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Sexual assault and Domestic Abuse Services Funding

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- SAVS is currently funded at **\$2.235 million** annually, DV services are currently funded at **\$12.4 million** annually. Those funding levels have been relatively static for the past decade.
- The static nature of funding has been a barrier to expanding culturally specific programs, who are providing services to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) survivors, often without adequate funding.
- Even at existing levels, SAVS and DV Services funding do not meet the needs of survivors in Wisconsin. **With the expected reductions in VOCA funding, now is the time for Wisconsin to make an investment in sexual and domestic violence services and prevention.**
- Increases for both DV and SA funding were included in the Governor's 23/25 executive budget. Unfortunately, those increases were removed in the final budget adopted by the legislature.

Our ask:

Please coauthor/cosponsor legislation that will increase funding for sexual assault and domestic violence services at \$14 million for Fiscal Year 23 and \$36 million for Fiscal Year 24.

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- **22 million** for fiscal year 24 (estimated impact of the VOCA cuts on DV/SA programs)



November 7, 2023

Human trafficking has been in Milwaukee and Wisconsin for years. It's not a new thing! So often it is right in front of us but we do not see it. Over the last 12 years it is now hard not to see it. Many of the women we work with have been trafficked in their youth and are then discarded by their trafficker because they are no longer as valuable or sometimes become drug dependent. In our intake 99% have been sexually assaulted in their youth leaving behind mental health issues and broken self-images. Many now deal with PTSD, Bipolar and even Schizophrenia as a result of the trauma experienced.

One of the first women we assisted left the streets after one of her "John's" died in her arms after being shot by her trafficker. She had been sexually exploited first by her mother then by several traffickers before this event. We assisted her into a residential DV safe house because there was a "hit placed on her." She is now living in another state, employed and self-sufficient. During her time on the streets she was diagnosed with schizophrenia due to trauma. After treatment in a residential program specifically for human trafficking, in another state, that diagnosis dropped off.

Each person we work with we learn more about the world of human trafficking. Many women have been beaten and tortured by their traffickers although not from the start. The lure is often sweet and attractive but eventually leads to physical, mental and physical abuse. The scars are deep. A woman panics when she sees a certain color and model of car because she had been strangled and left for dead on the road side. Many women have experienced similar events. Others must always see the door or an exit when in a room out of fear of being attacked. Other women become so triggered they dissociate and become violent.

Over the years several women have returned to our drop in who are clean and independent just to let us know they are OK. Often, we hear "Thank you for never giving up on me, for believing in me when no one else did." The road to restoration is one that is their journey – not ours!

Our model in working with the women is to build trusting relationships and begin restoring dignity/self-worth. Often the women feel this is their destiny and are not worth anything better. The mental abuse has convinced them it's their choice or fault when harm comes to them. When a person is ready we are there supporting her with options, transportation and ongoing emotional support. The road to restoration is long and difficult. We maintain contact until they no longer want us involved. We have continued contact with 30 of the 70 women we have assisted. One client now volunteers with us and another is on our fundraising committee.

The road to restoration is not easy. There are few residential programs that are specific for trafficking survivors. Substance abuse plays a role in self-medicating just to feel normal or do what their trafficker is forcing them to do. Dual treatment centers are few and far between. Wisconsin in particular does not have enough residential programming to meet the needs of those organizations work with.

Building trusting relationships takes time. We start with street outreach providing a bag lunch and seasonal items. Over the past few years we have made regular contact with 300+ individuals during

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the Inner Beauty Center



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street outreach twice a week. (Lincoln to National Avenues & 6th to 27th Streets, approximately four square miles.) During COVID we connected with about 400 individuals. We also offer a drop in twice a week that serves about 100 individuals each year. Women receive a home cooked meal, clothing of their choice, personal care items and options for future assistance at the drop in. Our observation is at minimum 50% are being trafficked. We know many have been trafficked in the past.

We operate mostly in Police District 2 and some in District 6. We have built "trusting" relationship with law enforcement as well. As awareness and education continues there is more understanding of the journey many prostituted women have traveled. I cannot say enough of two officers in District 2 who now check in with those on the streets offering help and transportation. There has also been excellent training in some of the hospitals to identify a trafficking victim assisting them with safe haven and options to exit. Again, the same issue continues – immediate safe haven, residential treatment programs, and transitional programs are scarce. Some women do not feel safe living independently for some time. Transitional programs are key to their success. A program in a nearby state allows women to stay in housing for as long as they need to feel safe.

I'd like to share the story of a woman we recently worked with. She had been severely beaten by a "John" which resulted in the need for surgery. Her trafficker did not release her after this but insisted she continue to make him money. The surgical area became infected but she refused to go to the hospital in spite of our many offers to take her. One evening she was miserable. She asked we call an ambulance as she was ready to go to the hospital. When they arrived, she changed her mind several times. Eventually she agreed to go if we gave her the family size bag of Reece's Peanut Butter Cups. She was told when she gets in the ambulance she could have it! She went and we did not hear or see her for several months. After 4 months she reached out to tell us she was clean, completed treatment and was with her family & children. She thanked us for caring for her more than she cared for herself. She was so thankful for us.

So what works? Being there and not judging. Accepting each person for the inherent value they have. After that, the journey becomes more difficult due to lack of residential programing for trafficking and substance abuse. Supporting an individual throughout their journey is also key. Educating the community on human trafficking is the only way to truly stop human sex trafficking. Children need to be educated on healthy relationships, healthy touch, who to talk to for help should they need to report. Parents need to be educated to believe their child and prosecute the offender. Both boys and girls need this education. A traffickers ACE scores (Adverse Childhood Experiences) tends to mirror that of the women they abuse. Traffickers have suffered as children as well. Most often the care a trafficker needs can only be rendered during incarceration.

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**Testimony of Mariana Rodriguez
Director of UMOS Latina Resource Center**

**Before the Wisconsin State Legislature
Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking
Jerry O'Connor Task Force Chair
November 8, 2023**

Representative O'Connor and members of the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking, thank you for the invitation to testify.

My name is Mariana Rodriguez. I am the Director of UMOS Latina Resource Center, a program that provides comprehensive culturally and linguistically specific advocacy services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. It is in my capacity as the director of the Center that I can state that addressing sex trafficking requires that we view this issue through various perspectives because of the complexities and understand the prevalence of prior victimization of sexual assault and domestic violence. These issues are lived experiences that all of the survivors of sex trafficking have whom I supported have shared.

For over 12 years UMOS Latina Resource Center has implemented statewide services to identify and serve adult and juvenile survivors of sex and labor trafficking. We have implemented outreach efforts to increase awareness of human trafficking and have established statewide partnerships to increase accessibility of services and resources to assist survivors' safety, wellness, and self-sufficiency.

I am aware that this taskforce is focused on sex trafficking, however, I would like to briefly share that UMOS Latina Resource Center is the lead agency for the WI Labor Trafficking Multi-Disciplinary Team Project, the lead law enforcement agency is the Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigation. This multi-disciplinary team is the first of its kind to respond to the issue of labor trafficking in our state.

Through our Wisconsin Regional Anti-Trafficking Program (WRAP) we have assisted survivors of trafficking with emergency lodging, food, clothing, rent & security, co-payments for medical care such as dental and AODA treatment. A community and coordinated approach are needed to address the complicated dynamics of human trafficking. Our funders that support our Anti-Human Trafficking programs include U.S. Department of Justice for Victims of Crime and Howard Buffett G. Foundation.

UMOS Latina Resource Center is also a grantee partner for the Wisconsin Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force led by Project Respect and WI Department of Justice Divisions of Criminal Investigation. As one of the funded victim service providers, we collaborate with law enforcement and victim services providers to implement a victim-centered, trauma informed response to human trafficking in Wisconsin communities. Through this grant we will continue to address sex trafficking.

Sex trafficking is an issue that impacts every community in our state, an issue that has devastated the lives of highly vulnerable individuals. The dynamics of sex trafficking is complicated and assisting victims often requires coordinated care from victim advocates, anti-trafficking advocates, healthcare providers, law enforcement, housing advocates, legal providers and AODA treatment centers. All of these partners often play a part in addressing the survivor's safety, housing, healthcare, securing basic essential needs and the prosecution of traffickers.

In my experience of advocating for survivors of sex trafficking, I have learned that they are resilient, brave, and courageous. They have not only survived the physical assault, rape, exploitation and often forced drug use from their traffickers, but have survived a long-standing history of victimization of sexual assault and living in violent homes. They have become victims of individuals that have often promised them safety, security, and love. Our initial contact with survivors is often challenging because they are struggling with their most basic needs such as housing, food, medical attention, and drug addiction. Providing support during these times, is heart breaking. They have been deprived of the most basic needs from traffickers.

Yet, regardless of these circumstances, they often express hope for a life that is free of drugs, have their own apartment and are employed, they are self-sufficient. Survivors are aware of the long journey that is ahead of them and recognize that they may not always have a support system who will encourage them along the way. Victim services advocates and other providers dedicated to support survivors become their source of emotional, and spiritual support.

I am aware that several agencies whom we partner in the efforts to combat human trafficking have already testified and have outlined their recommendations. As such I support following legislative solutions identified by the Wisconsin Anti-Human Trafficking Consortium – a state-wide group of concerned individuals and organizations interested in promoting safety and improving services for victims through policy and community awareness.

1) Enabling the expungement of criminal records. Amend the current expungement provision of Wisconsin Statute 973.015 (2)(m) to include all offenses victims were induced or compelled to commit while trafficked. Trafficking survivors should not be criminalized in situations they were victimized in. This change may help remove barriers to jobs and housing.

2) Enact a Safe Harbor law and undertake study to determine cost of fully funding. Safe Harbor laws remove the crime of juvenile prostitution and will make Wisconsin law consistent with federal law protecting juvenile human trafficking victims. A fully funded services component of Safe Harbor requires that specialized services be made available to survivors. Services include but are not limited to medical and psychological treatment, emergency and long-term housing, educational assistance, job training, assistance with language and legal services.

I often witnessed the challenges survivors encounter when they attempt to enter the workforce, they do not have a basic education and lack the skills to secure employment that will provide a livable wage.

3). Supporting funding that will focus on education & employment training programs that will assist survivors secure their GED, skilled trade, job search, and other employment ready programming focused to assist survivors enter the workforce.

4). As stated above, the intersectionality of domestic violence and sexual assault in the lives of survivors of sex trafficking in their lifetime either as children, youth and adults is a reality. Victim service programs such as domestic violence shelters and sexual assault programs are often the first to support survivors of sex trafficking in the hospital, shelters, or advocacy programs yet they are often stressed with lack of staff and funds to address the needs of the survivors. These programs are facing significant reductions in federal funds about 70% reduction, please coauthor/cosponsor legislation that will increase sexual assault and domestic violence services for fiscal year 23 and fiscal year 24 to avoid programs from eliminating services around our state impacting survivors from accessing advocacy services. These funds also support programs such as outreach programs, youth shelters, and advocacy services that serve vulnerable youth that are homeless and sexually exploited youth.

I am appearing before you today to share some of the solutions that are critical in responding to human trafficking in our state and supporting survivors of sex trafficking. Thank you for considering my comments.



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Testimony of Karri Hemmig
Founder and Executive Director of Fight to End Exploitation

Wisconsin State Legislature
Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking
Jerry O'Connor, Task Force Chair

November 8, 2023

To Representative O'Connor and members of the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. It's an honor to speak to you on such an important and timely subject.

My name is Karri Hemmig, and I work professionally in three separate capacities within the fight against human trafficking and offer my biggest takeaways from each experience that are valuable for your consideration as you adjust your legislative focus and impact on the State of Wisconsin. There are so many different and viable ways to attack this problem that it is difficult to narrow it down to a manageable few.

First, I am the co-founder and executive director of Fight to End Exploitation (FEE), a leading non-profit agency in southeastern Wisconsin with a collaborative focus that advocates for survivors of human trafficking, creates awareness of the crime, and trains helping professionals to identify and respond to victims. Our grant funders include the United Way of Racine County, Racine Community Foundation, and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Grant through Wisconsin DCFS, as a contractor through SAFE Haven, our regional youth shelter. Since its inception in 2013, FEE has provided advocacy for almost 500 victims of both sex and labor trafficking, ranging in age from 10 to 62 years old. Our board of directors and staff have over 250 collective years of experience working directly with this population in education, law enforcement, crisis housing, child protective services, medical forensics, and lived experience experts, among other focuses.

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What often supports human trafficking survivors the most, does not present on the surface as survivor-specific resources. Human Trafficking-focused resources are extremely important, but many times it means first meeting basic foundational needs such as:

- Ensuring safe and secure crisis and long-term housing
- Addressing medical and mental health issues
- Addiction and legal support
- Education and workforce development needs
- Supporting youth aging out of the foster care system

A community's ability to address these issues and remove potential vulnerabilities successfully is another way to fight human trafficking in a trauma-informed, victim-centered way. State funding is critical to ensure all social service agencies are supported.

Resources Recommended:

- Wisconsin Runaway Programs: <http://www.wahrs.org/programs.html>

I also currently serve as the Human Trafficking Support Specialist for the Racine Police Department. In this role for the past six years, I have advocated for victims and high-risk individuals coming in contact with law enforcement, assisted with proactive recoveries on law enforcement task forces, provided In-Service human trafficking training to officers, and created resources to support the families of missing children.

My biggest takeaway in this role is the understanding that we have to provide additional support to law enforcement if we want to make an impact on this crime. Providing resources like communication tools, in-house advocacy support, and funding investigative positions for police departments, as well as providing training at all levels of the justice system to increase prosecutions and serve justice to those who commit these crimes is essential to create the necessary impact.

Our law enforcement agencies are over tasked and officers need to identify it in other calls for service, document and report it to investigations, and share critical resources with potential victims. At the recent 2023 International Association of Chiefs of Police



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(IACP) conference in San Diego, it was clear that there are new emerging trends within gangs and sex trafficking. Consistent and equitable training for all officers is key to keeping up with all emerging trends and information and should be mandatory for all law enforcement academies in Wisconsin. State funding is essential to support law enforcement response to human trafficking.

Additionally, we must work together. Collaboration has been written into both international laws for human trafficking, and our federal laws, The Victims Protection Act (TVPA). I have sat on county and regional law enforcement task forces and have seen the successful collaborations that have positively impacted survivors. I have also seen that without them, law enforcement working in silos can lead to failed investigations and prosecutions, leading to failed support of the people this crime impacts the most, the victims. It is critical to remember that the 2015 Wisconsin Act 351 also provides rights to victims to have a victim advocate present and to increase utilization of that resource.

Resources Recommended:

- Multidisciplinary Collaborative Model for Anti-Human Trafficking Task Forces: Development and Operations Road Map prepared by IACP:
<https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/development-operations-roadmap-for-multidisciplinary-anti-human-trafficking-task>

Through my role as an associate and subject matter expert for the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) out of Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC), I train and work alongside law enforcement agencies nationwide. Part of my job is participating in listening sessions across the country on officers' challenges when it comes to child sex trafficking and missing children investigations to support new curriculum development for Amber Alert Technical Training. This gives me a vantage point to understand the common issues we all face, as well as the unique set of challenges within different communities, cultures, and special populations.

- Place value on recognizing marginalized populations within trafficking in Wisconsin and ensuring services are accessible to members of the LGBTQ+ community and indigenous communities, for example.

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- Create focused interventions for chronic runaways. The data indicates that chronic runaways are at high risk of human trafficking, and focus needs to be put on tactics to *prevent* vulnerabilities that lead to complex trauma created by this crime. Funding prevention tactics for this population are critical.
- Support and fully fund the Safe Harbor bill in Wisconsin to ensure child victims of sex trafficking are not treated as criminals. Furthermore, by eliminating the threat of prosecution, traffickers will no longer be able to use the threat of criminalization as a way to keep children inside the cycle of abuse they undergo while being trafficked.

Resource Recommended:

- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide 2023, prepared by NCJTC:
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:ef879afe-d163-3f0a-b062-470c908b3eff>

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

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