



*Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide non-profit focused on improving the lives and experiences of Maryland's children through policy change and program improvement. We champion solutions to child welfare, education, health, and juvenile justice issues, positioning us to influence the full spectrum of youth experiences. This multi-issue platform helps us to improve the entirety of children's worlds—the systems they touch, the people they interact with, and the environment where they live.*

## **Testimony before the Judicial Proceedings Committee**

### **In SUPPORT of**

### **Senate Bill 15- Child Placement - Prohibition on Human Trafficking, Restrictions on Advertising, and Reporting Requirements**

**Melissa Rock, Child Welfare Director, Advocates for Children and Youth  
January 27, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 15- Child Placement - Prohibition on Human Trafficking, Restrictions on Advertising, and Reporting Requirements. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

According to the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, all children under the age of 18 who are induced to engage in commercial sex are victims of sex trafficking.<sup>1</sup> Due to its proximity to the I-95 corridor, Maryland is uniquely positioned as a target by sex traffickers. In fact, Maryland ranks twelfth in the nation in reports of human trafficking cases.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of children victimized through sex trafficking have already been victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.<sup>3</sup> Studies show that as many as 80% of victims of commercial sexual exploitation are or were involved in the child welfare system.<sup>4</sup> In 2014, an estimated 70% of sex trafficking victims reported to The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were in the care of social services or foster care.<sup>5</sup> Children from foster care are especially vulnerable to become victims of sex trafficking due to their histories of abuse and broken support systems.<sup>6</sup> While some foster youth victims of sex trafficking are recruited directly from their group homes, many foster youth who run away from their placements fall prey to sex traffickers while on runaway.<sup>7</sup> The link between involvement in the child welfare system and becoming a victim of sex trafficking has been recognized on the national level, and in September 2014, Congress passed the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act to encourage states to put protections in place safeguards in place for foster youth to prevent them from being victimized.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S Department of State, 2000. See: <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013/210543.htm>

<sup>2</sup> National Human Trafficking Resource Center See: <https://traffickingresourcecenter.org/states>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/human-trafficking-guidance>

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.missingkids.com/lin6>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trafficking.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/human-trafficking-guidance>

One way former foster youth fall prey to sex traffickers is through a dangerous practice known as “rehoming.”<sup>8</sup> Rehoming is when adoptive parents or legal guardians find a new permanent home for their unwanted adopted child without notifying or consulting the proper authorities.<sup>9</sup> Children who are rehomed are easy targets for predators as there is no oversight during these custody transfers.<sup>10</sup> There is no way to track the child’s placement and no background checks are completed on the new guardians.<sup>11</sup> It is often sex traffickers who receive children who have been rehomed. Senate Bill 15 will help eliminate the pipeline between children who have been adopted and sex trafficking by prohibiting the rehoming practice.

Most foster youth who have spent many years in foster care, have moved through multiple families. Each move causes some trauma and makes it more and more difficult for them to trust and form healthy attachments to these adults. When an adoptive parent, the person who has been called their permanent, and often “forever family,” rehomes them, they suffer exponential trauma even apart from the trauma associated with becoming a sex trafficking victim.

Senate Bill 15 prohibits adoptive parents from rehoming their children. This bill will not prohibit custody transfers that are in the best interest of the child when a valid Power of Attorney is in place. The purpose of adoption is to provide a safe and permanent home to children. However, these adopted children are being further traumatized when the adults they were encouraged to trust and see as permanent caretakers subject them to such an awful betrayal victimization. **We urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 15 to help protect Maryland’s children from becoming victims of sex trafficking.**

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<sup>8</sup> <http://humantraffickingsearch.net/wp/rehoming-adopted-children/>

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> Id.