



**Minnesota Indian Women's
Resource Center**

2300 15th Avenue South (612) 728-2000
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404 FAX (612) 728-2039

Contact: Suzanne Koepplinger, Executive Director
skoepplinger@miwrc.org or 612-728-2008

**Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs at
hearing titled "Combating Human Trafficking: Federal, State, and Local Perspectives".
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Dear Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the women and children we serve at the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center in Minneapolis, I thank you for this opportunity to bring to your attention a grave and egregious human rights violation being perpetrated against vulnerable Native Americans in our country. Sex trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children is of growing concern in our community. In 2009, the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center published the first research on the scope of sex trafficking of any demographic group. Our *Shattered Hearts: the commercial sexual exploitation of American Indian women and children in Minnesota* report found highly disturbing indicators that American Indian females were being targeted by sex traffickers for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). For example, of women and girls screening into three direct service programs during the study, 40 % of incoming clients reported involvement in some type of commercial sexual exploitation and 27 % reported activities defined as sex trafficking under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Our current direct service program for trafficked and high risk Native girls is screening all youth entering the program for sexual exploitation risk factors and involvement. Using standardized assessment tools we found that 71 % of girls entering the program had experienced long term homelessness, had a family member diagnosed with mental illness, and had experienced harassment and/or physical or sexual violence. Eighty six percent had a history of child protection systems involvement, and the same percentage (86%) of these girls reported some exposure to the sex trade. At a six month follow up screening, 71% of the girls were safely housed and 100% had begun receiving mental health care. All girls in this program also reported that they now knew where to get help and how to avoid high risk situations and people who were a bad influence on them. Three girls from the current cohort graduated from high school this year, the first in any of their extended families to do so. This program is the only one of its kind to provide these culturally strength based services to this population, has a wait list, and is receiving more referrals from law enforcement agencies every week.

We continue to receive reports from girls in our programs, from Greater Minnesota tribal sexual assault advocates, and local law enforcement that Native girls are being targeted for recruitment by traffickers to the oil fields of North Dakota and being sold in the "man camps". One alleged incident involved a 14 year old Native girl who was reportedly sold to 40 men in one night. A 15 year old girl in our program reported that her brother's best friend had been making frequent attempts to take her to North Dakota where, he said, she could "make lots of money" for them.

The Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition's 2011 report *Garden of Truth: the Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota* interviewed 105 Native women with prostitution arrest records. They found that a majority of the women had been sexually abused as children, had been raped, and were currently or previously homeless. Anchorage Police and FBI statistics show that Alaska Native women represent 33 % of all prostituted and trafficked women in the city, yet Alaska Natives make up less than 8% of

the total population. Most Native females are sold in urban areas, but it is unknown how many of these women initially came from reservation communities or are city residents. We have no data on the scope of exploitation of boys or GLBTQ or “Two Spirit” youth, but recognize them as also vulnerable. National statistics tell us that over 70 % of American Indian people in this country reside in urban areas, not on their home reservations. Solutions must include tribal and urban populations for maximum benefit.

We believe the data we have on hand to reflect only a small portion of the true picture of those who have been trafficked into prostitution, for a number of reasons. The widespread normalization of sexual violence in American Indian communities has numbed many youth to the point where they minimize and rationalize what is happening to them just as domestic violence victims do. Many are engaged in survival sex simply to have a place to sleep at night. Others are gang raped in by Native Mob or other local street gangs and are living in fear of the consequences if they do not comply. Native Mob is only one of the gangs we have seen involved in the trafficking of Native girls due to their unique vulnerability. Methods of recruitment can involve what we call “guerrilla pimping”, which is simply gang rape with brutal beatings, or “finesse pimping”, which is often much more difficult to detect and interrupt. This is a grooming process, and has a manipulative pattern similar to domestic violence perpetration, where the initial relationship is loving but becomes increasingly more controlling, with the end result being girls caught in a web of violence and abuse with little hope to escape. Drugs are often used to ensure compliance. Most of these girls have multiple risk factors such as homelessness, early sexual abuse, and/or addiction or mental illness of parents/caregivers. Willingness to report or cooperate with law enforcement is rare due to the lack of secure housing and deep, complex trauma these children suffer from. As they are reluctant to report to law enforcement, they are not counted in the national data sets as trafficking victims. The current requirement to have a law enforcement certification of victimization in order to be counted as a trafficking victim has limited our understanding of the scope of the problem nationally. We believe that 80 – 90% of trafficked youth are under the radar and not being reported for this reason.

The damage to the victims is severe in human and economic terms. Our 2012 research report *Early Intervention to Avoid Sex Trading and Trafficking of Minnesota’s Female Youth: A Benefit-Cost Analysis*, found the quantifiable damage to a juvenile female recruited into sexual slavery includes high rates of physical damage including traumatic brain injury, damage to reproductive systems, and injuries from violent assaults. Mental health issues such as PTSD, dis-associative disorders, complex anxiety disorders are common. We cannot quantify the damage to a child’s spirit, or self-esteem, or to her family. Yet this analysis shows a definitive return on investment to the taxpayer of \$34 for every \$1 spent on early intervention and prevention services. We know what works, and have the evidence that it not only saves lives, but saves taxpayer dollars. It is now a matter of prioritization.

Since the publication of our *Shattered Hearts* report, the Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center has engaged our local community and tribal partners in solutions. The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe is working to collect more data and create systemic responses to sex trafficking. I have conducted training in indigenous communities across the country, including the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Ft. Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. In each instance, there is a need for more awareness of the tactics being used by perpetrators, and requests for technical assistance in identifying and responding to this crime. There is a gap in the need for coordinated responses and the resources available. In North Dakota, for example, tribal sexual assault advocates report numerous young women who had reportedly been victimized by sex traffickers but were too frightened by threats of consequences to their loved ones to report these crimes to law enforcement. The Bakken Oil Fields are indeed a boon to the economy of the region, and have also created an explosive market for sex traffickers who find vulnerable victims among Native American and other marginalized groups. This presents the opportunity for the businesses that are profiting from the oil industry to step into their leadership role. There is a great need for more law enforcement, more awareness and education, and more victim services in this region. I hope that the industry will seize this opportunity to invest in the wellness of the entire community in which they now work and live.

The Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force has created a strong multi-disciplinary response to human trafficking. In 2011 the State passed the Safe Harbor for Youth Act, which aligns state statute with the Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act in recognizing any juvenile sold into prostitution as a victim of a crime. In 2012 we presented a state-wide housing and services response called No Wrong Door for Services to the legislature. This is a comprehensive approach – developed by teams of prosecutors, police officers, county child protection workers, social workers, faith community, public health professionals, educators, and front line advocates – to create an effective system of housing and services that would work in partnership with law enforcement and county child welfare teams to effectively identify victims of CSE and route them into appropriate healing services rather than the juvenile justice system. We were successful in securing initial funding to begin implementing the No Wrong Door Model, but are seeking additional resources to fully fund the comprehensive approach that includes more accurate data collection systems to help us better understand the scope of the problem. We are collectively designing more effective approaches to reduce the demand for sexually exploited persons, for without the demand there would be no supply.

I want to again thank the Committee Members for their leadership in recognizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to ending the sexual slavery of vulnerable people. No person should be viewed as a commodity. One study tells us that a pimp can earn between \$150,000 - \$200,000 for each single child sold repeatedly for sex. Sex trafficking is a highly lucrative criminal enterprise that is robbing our communities of the youth, who are our future. It is reliant upon a market demand that must be stopped. We need more resources across sectors, but particularly within law enforcement, victim services, and child protection departments – to begin to interrupt this human rights violation and ensure that all children can grow up without being sentenced to a lifetime of trauma and violence.

Thank you.