

Statement of Daniel Papa,
Director of "Project Stay Gold"
at a Hearing of the
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
"Combatting Human Trafficking:
Federal, State, and Local Perspectives"
Washington, D.C.

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I would like to begin by thanking the Homeland Security Committee for this incredible opportunity to share the accomplishments of my students. I would especially like to thank Senator Jeff Chiesa for his inspiring efforts and his committed support of me and my students.

Today, we are confronted by the emerging and horrific crime of human trafficking. There is an estimated 27 million people enslaved around our world. This means there are more slaves on planet earth now than at any other time in human history. Furthermore, an estimated 100,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across the United States. I believe the solution to combating modern day slavery is sitting in classrooms all over America. In the face of this global issue, my students have started a movement by implementing effective solutions to rescue their generation and abolish modern day slavery. I am here today to share with you our vision for a renewed abolitionist movement.

As a history teacher, I believe that history is a verb, it is something we do, and it is made every day. I have instilled in my students that we learn history to make history. The journey of Project Stay Gold began in October of 2010 when I was teaching my students about the introduction of slavery to the Jamestown colony. While teaching about slavery in our nation's past, I made the connection to today by communicating that slavery still exists in our world. With an interactive website prompt on the smart board in my classroom, I explained the issue of modern day slavery to my students. In passing, I mentioned that if anyone was interested in starting an awareness campaign later in the school year that I would support that effort as an advisor. As a teacher, I have observed that when issues of injustice are covered in class there is a deeper level of engagement. Simply stated, young people have sensitivity to issues of injustice. This sensitivity to matters of injustice was the spark that ignited the fire within my students to begin a modern day abolitionist movement.

Two months later, one of my students, Kate came to me and asked for the address of the website that I used to expose the issue of human trafficking. Following the Christmas recess, Kate returned to my room, and told me that she was moved by the website; she had become captivated by the issue. She looked at me and said "Mr. Papa, we have to do something." From that point on, we decided to organize an awareness campaign for our school. Little did we know, thirty-five other students felt that same way about the issue as Kate did. At the time, the students were reading the novel, *The*

Outsiders by S.E. Hinton, and they particularly liked one phrase from the end of the book “stay gold.” My students interpreted the phrase “stay gold” to mean, stay innocent, stay pure, and stay true to yourself. This is the exact message they desire to communicate to their generation in the face of this crime. For the next two months, thirty-five students and myself, along with two other teachers, Sharon Ciliento and Nancy Harris organized the school wide campaign. Inspired by the Frederick Douglass quote, “I expose slavery in this country, because to expose it is to kill it,” the awareness campaign was born. To communicate the issue, students created posters with pictures and statistics, included information about human trafficking on the morning announcements, and created a lesson to deliver to their peers during a Social Studies class. As part of the campaign, the students decided to order abolitionist wristbands to sell and raise money for a local organization that is on the front lines of fight against human trafficking. The campaign was a success; an entire school was made aware of the issue. The students sold four hundred abolitionist wristbands in less than 24 hours. The students had successfully started a conversation about modern day slavery, and they have not stopped talking about it since.

The students were not satisfied with simply awakening their school to the horrible reality of modern day slavery; they wanted to take their message to their generation. They decided to take their campaign to the Internet. Collaborating with a videographer and a web designer, Peter Nevill, the students launched a website. The site contained videos they had produced, songs they had written, pieces of art they had created, and the information they had learned. Following the launch of the website, Project Stay Gold was invited to our State capital to present at Human Trafficking Awareness Day. For the past two years the students delivered speeches, presented their videos, performed songs, and displayed their art before an audience of 200 state and local officials. January 11th, 2012 also marked Jeff Chiesa’s first day as the Attorney General of the State of New Jersey. From that day on a partnership developed between Project Stay Gold, government officials, and other agencies such as Homeland Security and the FBI.

Since then, many opportunities arose for our students to raise awareness and use the power of education to awaken people to the reality of modern day slavery. Project Stay Gold was invited to present at the Department of Health and Human Services Awareness Day in New York City last October and have made presentations at public libraries, churches, community centers, colleges, and universities. The videos were also used as a training tool for staff and personnel at Picatinny Arsenal (United States Army). In addition, students have traveled to neighboring middle and high schools through out North Jersey to teach lessons and host assemblies communicating the issue of human trafficking to their peers.

Through their research, the students learned about the existence of human trafficking surrounding the host cities of the National Football League’s Super Bowl each year. In February of 2014, the Super Bowl will be played at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Motivated to confront the emergence of human trafficking at this year’s Super Bowl in our state, the students of Project Stay Gold have launched their *Not On Our Turf* (students for a traffick free Super Bowl) campaign. On October 15th, our students are hosting a student summit where they have invited students and teachers

from all over the state to learn the issue, provide them with action kits, and empower them to start an awareness campaign at their schools leading up to the Super Bowl. New Jersey's Director of Criminal Justice and a Homeland Security agent are both keynoting. On November 16th, our second summit will take place in New York City. In addition, one student started a petition on change.org petitioning the Super Bowl host committee to address human trafficking around their event. In less than two weeks, his petition has collected more than three thousand signatures. The *Not On Our Turf* campaign also includes public service announcements featuring our students that we hope will air on cable television and public radio leading up the Super Bowl.

As I look at my students, I see modern examples of William Lloyd Garrison, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass. The students of Project Stay Gold are abolitionists, history makers, and world changers. Together, we believe that every young person in America can be an abolitionist and history maker as well. We believe that a revived abolitionist movement has started inside classrooms all over America. Motivated with sensitivity and empathy for trafficked young people just like them, students across the nation can be the voice of the voiceless. This modern day abolitionist movement must begin with students educating students on the warning signs, risk factors, and raising their voice to rescue their own generation. The critical component to combating human trafficking in our society is educating young people to advocate and pursue the abolition of modern day slavery among their generation. Education is much more than raising awareness; it is a monumental step toward prevention. As the American Abolitionist, Maria Weston Chapman reminds us; "Slavery can only be abolished by raising the character of people who compose the nation..." Through education our students are not just gaining knowledge, but also contributing to a nation where human rights are respected and an individual's dignity and worth are kept sacred. In education, there is no more important task than the development of an informed and responsible citizen.

A partnership between schools and government leaders establishes the foundation for this modern day abolitionist movement. The first step could be for Federal, State, and Local governments to declare January 11th as National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. In addition to the declaration, the Department of Education could issue a directive that human trafficking education will be a part of middle and high school curriculums during the month of January. Federal and State governments, through their respective Departments of Education, could emphasize the need for educating our students about the horrors of human trafficking. The availability of federal grants for student organizations, that meet certain requirements to organize abolitionist movements in their schools and communities, would provide the necessary resources for student organizations to succeed. Lastly, if Federal, State, and Local governments were to advertise and publicize the national human trafficking hotline number: 1-888-3737-888, young people would have access to resources that government agencies will provide.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to testify in front of you this afternoon and I look forward to working closely with you to combat this horrific underground atrocity affecting our young people today.