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Testimony on Prostitution Bill, Senate Judiciary Committee, Oct 2009

Donna M. Hughes, Dr.



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Testimony on Prostitution Bill

Senate Judiciary Committee

October 28, 2009

Donna M. Hughes

Professor & Carlson Endowed Chair

Women's Studies Program

University of Rhode Island

Co-founder, Citizens Against Trafficking

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I am here to support a bill that will give Rhode Island the prostitution law it needs to combat the growing sex industry and sex trafficking.

Many letters and reports have been written describing the problems that decriminalized prostitution has created for Rhode Island. We know that women from foreign countries are here in the spa-brothels. We know that U.S. teens are trafficked here from other states. We know there is much evidence of sex trafficking in the Asian spa-brothels and strip clubs.

Our lack of a prostitution law stands in the way of law enforcement intervention to stop pimps and sex traffickers and subsequently assist victims. Law enforcement cannot adequately investigate harmful activities indoors without a law. Rhode Island cannot hold perpetrators accountable and end the exploitation and abuse of women, children, and mostly likely some men, without a law.

A number of leading authorities in the country have written to you urging you to pass a prostitution law that will make buying and selling sex a misdemeanor, and keeping the pimping laws felonies.

A number of regional service providers for women and children victims of trafficking and prostitution have written describing the harm to victims. They have documented that Rhode Island is a destination for victims for all over the northeast. We owe our neighbors a law that will prevent their women and girls from being abused in our state.

We owe our own citizens protection from pimps and sex traffickers. This past weekend, the FBI conducted a nationwide crackdown on pimps, another name for a sex trafficker. There were arrests in 36 cities that resulted in rescuing 52 children and arresting 60 pimps. No city in Rhode Island was included in this action. Since 2003, the Innocence Lost National Initiative has rescued

nearly 900 children and resulted in 510 convictions of pimps. Rhode Island has never been included in the Innocence Lost National Initiative because we don't have a law against prostitution that would enable our state and local police agencies to cooperate with federal law enforcement.

I want Rhode Island to be a participant in the leading national effort to stop sex traffickers of children. I want our state and local law enforcement agencies to be able to stop predators within the state.

Finally, after a long process of drafting bills and negotiating, we have a prostitution bill that I think is one of the best in the country. It has a provision that will ensure that victims of trafficking are not punished, one of the legitimate concerns of opponents.

Please pass this bill today.

Thank you.