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## Testimony for Trafficking Bill, Rhode Island House Judiciary Committee, Oct 2009

Donna M. Hughes, Dr.



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# Testimony on Trafficking Bill

## House Judiciary Committee

October 27, 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 trafficking bill that will do two things:

- 1) Criminalize forced labor as a form of human trafficking.
- 2) Make it easier to prosecute sex trafficking of minors by removing the requirement to prove force, fraud, or coercion.

These two changes to the Rhode Island human trafficking law will bring our law up to the national standard.

There's not a lot of information available about forced labor in Rhode Island because of the underground nature of this problem, but we know it exists in other states. The victims are almost always foreign citizens, often here illegally. Human traffickers prey on their vulnerability. We need a law that will hold perpetrators accountable when a forced labor situation is discovered ---and it eventually will be. Laura Lederer, former Executive Director of an interagency policy group that staffed the President's cabinet-level Inter-agency Task Force on Trafficking in Persons, once said this about the existence of victims: "If you look, you'll find them."

Concerning the change in the sex trafficking law: We need to hold pimps and sex traffickers who prey on children accountable without requiring the children to prove they were coerced into prostitution. That is the standard for prohibiting adults to sexually victimize children.

Please pass this bill.

Thank you.