

# University of Rhode Island

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## From the SelectedWorks of Donna M. Hughes

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August 5, 2009

## Rhode Island Left Out of FBI Initiative

Donna M. Hughes, Dr.



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## Press Release

**Rhode Island Left Out of FBI Initiative**

Rhode Island has been excluded from federal law enforcement investigations of sex trafficking of children because there is no law against prostitution.

Innocence Lost (<http://www.fbi.gov/innolost/innolost.htm>) is a national initiative to combat the problem of domestic sex trafficking of children in the United States. Since June 2003, the combined efforts of the FBI, the Department of Justice Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children have rescued 770 American child victims of prostitution and convicted almost 500 sex traffickers.

“Rhode Island is not a viable participant [in the Innocence Lost National Initiative] because of a loophole in your state’s statutes,” according to a recent letter to Governor Donald Carcieri and Attorney General Patrick Lynch from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

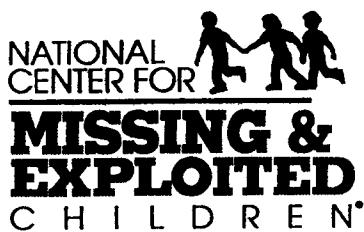
It is outrageous that our state has been left out of a national effort to rescue victims and prosecute some of the most vicious criminals that prey on children. For six years, federal agencies have made investigating and prosecuting sex traffickers of children a priority. During the same time period, Rhode Island’s sex industry has been expanding and victimizing increasing numbers of children and young adults. Rhode Island is a destination for pimps to exploit victims with impunity.

The letter from NCMEC goes on to say that the lack of a prostitution law “deprives Rhode Island law enforcement of the ability to detect whether children are being victimized in this commercial sex trade, to rescue these child victims and to provide them with the services they so desperately need. Your state’s efforts in the fight against child prostitution would be greatly enhanced if law enforcement were empowered to fully investigate the commercial sex trade.”

Citizens Against Trafficking, again, calls for the Rhode Island Senate to pass the House version of the prostitution bill (H 5044A). It is long since time for Rhode Island to join the national effort to combat sex trafficking and stop the pimps who traffic victims in Rhode Island.

A copy of the letter is attached.

Donna M. Hughes, PhD  
Co-founder  
Citizens Against Trafficking



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July 23, 2009

The Honorable Donald Carcieri  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Carcieri:

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) has become aware of the current controversy over Rhode Island's prostitution laws. We are concerned that inadvertent omissions have created inadequacies in your statutes which impede Rhode Island law enforcement's efforts to effectively combat child prostitution in your state. It is essential for you to urge the Rhode Island legislature to address these inadequacies. We applaud your long leadership and commitment on behalf of Rhode Island's children, and your initiative in tackling this under-recognized problem. We strongly believe that those who prey on these child victims should be brought to justice.

Although there is a common misconception that child prostitution happens only in other countries, the unfortunate reality is that child prostitution is a widespread problem in the United States with devastating consequences for American children as well as the children who are trafficked here from other countries. These children are being bought and sold as commodities at truck stops, city streets, motels, private clubs, casinos, and on the Internet. Research from the University of Pennsylvania found that nearly 300,000 American youth are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation, most of whom are runaways. NCMEC conservatively estimates that at least 100,000 children each year are caught up in the insidious world of child prostitution.

As you may be aware, NCMEC operates the Congressionally-mandated CyberTipline, the national clearinghouse for leads and tips regarding child sexual exploitation. NCMEC receives reports from electronic service providers and members of the public about eight categories of crimes against children, including child prostitution. Since the creation of the

CyberTipline in 1998, NCMEC has received more than 710,000 reports about crimes against children. Specifically, the CyberTipline has received 7,903 reports about child prostitution and trafficking, and an additional 1,000 reports of known missing children being prostituted. NCMEC analysts review the leads, add information that would be useful to law enforcement, and provide the reports to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation.

NCMEC also partners with the FBI and the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the U.S. Department of Justice on the Innocence Lost National Initiative (ILNI), a program aimed at eradicating the commercial sex trafficking of children in the United States. As part of this initiative, the FBI conducts Operation Cross Country, a national sting operation operated in coordination with state and local law enforcement multiple times throughout the year. In partnership with the FBI agents and analysts co-located at NCMEC headquarters, NCMEC supports law enforcement's efforts by providing public records database and CyberTipline information on potential child victims and suspected pimps and their associates. To date, the ILNI has resulted in 310 indictments, 494 convictions, 51 criminal enterprises disrupted, and 36 successfully dismantled. Since the inception of the initiative, 770 American child victims of prostitution have been located and recovered.

Despite the dramatic success of the ILNI in communities across the country, Rhode Island is not a viable participant because of a loophole in your state's statutes. Under current Rhode Island law, commercial sex between adults inside a building is considered a private activity and is thus protected. This deprives Rhode Island law enforcement of the ability to detect whether children are being victimized in this commercial sex trade, to rescue these child victims, and to provide them with the services they so desperately need. Your state's efforts in the fight against child prostitution would be greatly enhanced if law enforcement were empowered to fully investigate the commercial sex trade in order to rescue the children who are being prostituted in your state.

We share your concern for these child victims and your conviction that the pimps and offenders who victimize them should be punished to the full extent of the law. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff if there is anything we can do to assist you.

Thank you for all that you do on behalf of our nation's children.

Sincerely,



Ernie Allen  
President & CEO



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July 23, 2009

The Honorable Patrick C. Lynch  
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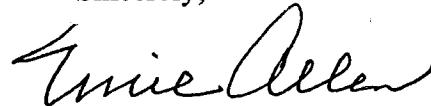
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Sincerely,



Ernie Allen  
President & CEO