

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Executive Business Meeting
February 26, 2015**

This week, the Judiciary Committee held a powerful hearing outlining the importance of passing legislation that will help eradicate the scourge of human trafficking in this country. I commend Chairman Grassley and Senator Feinstein for holding the hearing. Members on both sides of the aisle made clear their commitment to passing meaningful legislation – not only to help existing victims of human trafficking, but also to help protect in the future those who all too often fall prey to human trafficking, the children who have run away from home or are homeless. We heard from a brave trafficking survivor about her experience of being “walking prey” after she ran away from home. She testified that “many survivors, including [her]self, agree that policies on prevention should be one of our highest priorities, which is why it should also be a priority for policymakers.”

I strongly agree with Senator Collins, who testified that “homeless youth need access to safe beds at night and services during the day so that they never have to choose between selling their bodies and a safe place to sleep. I hope this Committee will reauthorize these programs, which for 40 years have helped protect our most vulnerable children.”

All four Senators who testified at the hearing are supporters of Senator Collins’ and my bill, the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act. Our bipartisan legislation was overwhelmingly supported by members on this Committee just six months ago, so there is no good reason why it should no longer receive that same support. However, I understand that Republicans on the Committee now have concerns about the anti-discrimination provision, and unfortunately Sen. Cornyn would not agree to include our bill in the manager’s package. There may be a way to come to an agreement on this important anti-discrimination language. Regardless, Senator Collins and I will insist on our bill being considered as an amendment on the floor once what is reported today is brought up for consideration. I support efforts to combat trafficking and to protect all victims, and I will continue to work with the authors of other trafficking bills and with Senator Collins to make sure our trafficking prevention legislation receives a vote by the full Senate.

The nomination of Loretta Lynch to serve as our next Attorney General is listed for the second time this week and should be reported after an unprecedented delay by Republicans. The U.S. Attorney’s Office that Ms. Lynch currently leads has secured one of the highest number of terrorism convictions in the country. Just yesterday, she announced charges against three Brooklyn residents with attempt and conspiracy to provide material support to the so-called Islamic-State. Loretta Lynch’s strength and vigilance comes as no surprise to anyone who watched the Judiciary Committee hearings four weeks ago. Loretta Lynch is a superb prosecutor who has earned the respect and admiration of both Republicans and Democrats. Her father, the Reverend Lorenzo Lynch of North Carolina, who stayed throughout both days of testimony for his daughter’s nomination, is here with us today. I welcome Reverend Lynch. I know he is proud of his daughter.

Ms. Lynch has the support of law enforcement and the civil rights community. We have received numerous letters and statements from individuals and organizations in support of Loretta Lynch's nomination to serve as Attorney General, including:

- Congressman John Lewis of Georgia
- Former FBI Director Louis Freeh
- The International Association of Chiefs of Police
- Both the current and former New York Police Commissioners, William Bratton and Ray Kelly
- Many former Justice Department officials from both Republican and Democratic administrations
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights on behalf of its more than 200 member organizations

Not a single witness who testified before this Committee opposes her nomination. Ms. Lynch testified before this Committee for nearly 8 hours and she responded to nearly 900 written questions, which is unprecedented. Many of the written questions were from Senators who had already declared their opposition to her nomination. She has now been pending far longer than any modern Attorney General nominee. The Committee should approve her nomination today so that the full Senate can confirm her without further delay. I hope that Senators will base their vote on Ms. Lynch's long and laudable record of public service and not cynically use this process as an effort to curry favor for their next campaign. Our nation's top law enforcement officer deserves no less.

The Committee is also finally turning today to the nomination of Michelle Lee to serve as Director of the Patent & Trademark Office. This position has been vacant for more than two years, which is far too long for an office that is so important to our nation's innovators. Ms. Lee has strong bipartisan support and I hope her confirmation will be taken up swiftly on the Senate floor.

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