

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein in Support of S. 1312 Trafficking Victims Protection Act and S. 1311 Abolish Human Trafficking Act

Senate Judiciary Committee

Executive Business Meeting

Thursday, June 29, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to begin by thanking you, Mr. Chairman, as well as Senators Cornyn, Klobuchar and the members of this Committee and all of their staffs for prioritizing anti-trafficking legislation, and for doing so in a bipartisan way.

Today we are considering two comprehensive anti-trafficking bills to help victims of trafficking crimes.

The Chairman's bill, which I worked on with him, is also cosponsored by Senators Cornyn, Klobuchar, Hatch, Leahy, Coons, and Blumenthal in this Committee. It reauthorizes a number of important programs that help exploited children. The bill also contains provisions to train school resource officers, prosecutors, law enforcement personnel, and juvenile court judges to prevent trafficking and aid victims.

It further promotes federal coordination, to make sure that trafficking victims are properly screened, and that more comprehensive data about trafficking crimes are collected.

I also understand that yesterday afternoon, CJS staff reached out to my staff about concerns relating to a provision in the bill that may lead to funding duplicative programs, and I'm hopeful, Mr. Chairman, that we can work out those differences once the bill is reported out of the Committee.

Senator Cornyn and Senator Klobuchar's bill – the Abolish Human Trafficking Act – is equally comprehensive and I am pleased to cosponsor it alongside so many members of this Committee.

It too reauthorizes a number of programs to help victims, and makes important updates to the Combat Human Trafficking Act of 2015, which I worked on with Senator Portman several years ago.

The issue of trafficking is one I care deeply about, and one that continues to have a devastating impact in my State and across our nation.

In fact, just last month, I met with a group of anti-trafficking stakeholders in Fresno, California, who reinforced the immense gravity of the problem.

At our meeting, survivors, law enforcement and service providers discussed the complex circuits that run through California, Nevada and beyond, which are used to shuttle victims as young as ten-years-old to bidders.

They talked to me about the increasingly dominant role violent gangs are playing in facilitating the recruitment and exploitation of victims. And, they talked to me about the seemingly endless demand for trafficking in the Central Valley and its calamitous toll on victims.

This problem is not confined to the Central Valley. In Alameda County, about 600 victims of commercial sexual exploitation are identified each year – some as young as 11-years-old.

California is not alone in facing these challenges.

In 2016, the joint investigative efforts of FBI's human trafficking programs resulted in the initiation of over 1,800 human trafficking investigations and the arrests of nearly 2,600 individuals for sex and labor trafficking offenses by federal, state, and local law enforcement task force officers.

Under the FBI's Innocence Lost National Initiative, approximately 6,000 juvenile victims have been recovered from child sex trafficking throughout the duration of the program. But that is just a glimpse of how many victims there truly are.

The NGO National Human Trafficking Resource Center, which operates a nationwide hotline to receive human trafficking reports, receives tens of thousands of reports every year.

So while we still try to grapple with the depth and breadth of the problem, the bills today should help. They promote better collection of data on human trafficking offenses by federal agencies, and also require reporting of trends on human trafficking offenses.

With human trafficking, despite our past legislative efforts, we can all agree that we have to continue to strive do better to protect the vulnerable among us.

One way to do so is to help address the proliferation of trafficking offenses over the internet. The human trafficking industry continues to be one of the largest criminal enterprises in the world, and an increasing volume of business is being conducted online.

In one survivor study, 75% of minor sex trafficking victims reported being bought or sold online.

And last year, the Washington Post published gut-wrenching accounts of Islamic State fighters selling young girls over mainstream platforms, such as Facebook. Traffickers who break the law should not be permitted to use tech platforms and other tools to commit their crimes.

The bill that Chairman Grassley and I have introduced includes a provision that would give law enforcement injunctive authority to prevent traffickers from using the Internet and other

tech platforms to sell children for sex.

Such authority has been used in other contexts, such as to prevent a criminal from distributing an illegal “spying app” over the internet. Human traffickers should be treated no differently.

The Chairman’s bill also strengthens efforts to prevent and detect trafficking crimes.

Critically, it makes funds available to train school resource personnel in how to identify sexual exploitation and respond effectively.

In Oakland California and elsewhere, sexually exploited minors are often recruited outside of their schools.

In one heartbreaking case in Oakland, a 12-year-old student with top grades suddenly stopped completing her assignments, became withdrawn, and began wearing provocative clothing. Eventually, she stopped attending school altogether and disappeared.

24-hours later, she was found online, being advertised for sex nearly 400 miles away. She had been recruited and groomed by a trafficker— but no one recognized the signs of exploitation.

Teachers and school personnel interact with our kids every day. We need to be sure they are familiar with the patterns and practices of human traffickers, and know how to identify and respond to victims.

In addition to working with Chairman Grassley on our bill, I am also pleased to cosponsor Senator Cornyn’s and Senator Klobuchar’s Abolish Human Trafficking Act of 2017.

One of the most important provisions of this bill is the mandatory designation of a Human Trafficking Justice Coordinator in each United States Attorney’s Office.

Among other tasks, this Coordinator would be responsible for ensuring individuals who solicit minors for sex are prosecuted. This is a critical aspect of combatting trafficking that is happening far too infrequently at present.

The Coordinator would also be responsible for making sure victims receive the restitution they are owed.

One of the other ways that human trafficking rings continue to explode in California is through criminal gang involvement.

I understand from law enforcement throughout my state that gangs view trafficking as less risky and more profitable than other criminal enterprises. In Los Angeles, this has become a significant issue.

As a result, I support the provision in the bill that would update the Criminal Street Gangs Statute to include human trafficking crimes as predicate crimes. This would update the statute to mirror what is really going on in the streets according to law enforcement.

While our work is far from complete, I believe both of these bills will help us make progress.

I urge my colleagues to support their passage and continue to present a strong, united front in the fight against trafficking.