

Statement of

# **The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
United States Senate  
September 14, 2011

Today, this Committee considers the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2011, and how best to continue and improve our efforts to end once and for all human trafficking at home and abroad.

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery in which victims are forced into labor or sexual exploitation. Traffickers prey on the most vulnerable members of society, and no country is immune. It happens even here, in our own backyard.

Earlier this summer, the Justice Department secured convictions against traffickers who compelled undocumented immigrant women hired to be waitresses to engage in commercial sex acts using violence, fraud, coercion and threats of deportation. Sadly, we hear similar reports about human trafficking every day.

Thanks to the tools provided by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, we have made progress in combating this major human rights abuse. But there is more work to be done. As a country that has long been a beacon of hope to so many who face human rights abuses abroad, the United States must address this continuing injustice around the world and here at home.

The original Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its three subsequent reauthorizations all had widespread bipartisan support. The original bill was passed by a Republican-controlled Congress and signed into law by President Clinton, and the most recent reauthorization in 2008 was passed by a Democratic-controlled Congress and signed into law by President Bush. I am pleased that the reauthorization bill we are discussing today continues that tradition, thanks to our cosponsors - Senators Brown, Rubio, and Cochran, as well as Senators Kerry, Feinstein, Klobuchar, Boxer, Cardin, Gillibrand and Schumer.

The bipartisan support for this bill in the Senate reflects the widespread focus on combating human trafficking in diverse communities across the country. Organizations from across the political and social spectrum, including faith-based groups and groups dedicated to human rights and women's rights, have taken up this cause. They have worked to raise awareness and to provide essential services to survivors of trafficking. State and local law enforcement agencies and prosecutors have stepped up human trafficking enforcement. They have initiated local investigations and have worked in collaboration with Federal agencies in regional task forces to share information and resources and to conduct joint investigations of these complex, multi-faceted crimes. The National Association of Attorneys General has launched a major campaign to combat human trafficking in all 50 states.

More than 40 state legislatures have followed the Federal Government's lead and enacted anti-trafficking statutes. I am proud that Vermont recently passed a comprehensive anti-trafficking

law that includes criminal penalties, prevention programs, and services for human trafficking victims. I commend Vermont for taking on this important issue.

Today's hearing aims to highlight the important anti-human trafficking work that the Federal Government is doing as a result of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. We also hope to discover ways we can do this crucial work better and more efficiently in the future.

Today we have witnesses from three Federal agencies that play key roles in Federal efforts to end human trafficking. The Departments of Justice, State, and Homeland Security investigate human trafficking crimes, use diplomatic tools to stop human trafficking in other countries, and ensure that trafficking victims receive crucial assistance and resources to assist law enforcement and begin to the long process of recovery.

I look forward to hearing from all of today's witnesses.

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