



Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chairman Manning, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of Senate Bill 13.

My name is Erica Peoples and I am the Director of Gracehaven. We serve minor victims of sex trafficking ages 11-19, both in the community, by providing case management and education services, as well as, a Therapeutic group home right here in Columbus, for youth who are unable to live at home or with family.

During this time I have heard hundreds of stories, shed endless tears and have had the unfortunate privilege of providing services to an overwhelming number of youth. The reality is, these stories don't get any easier and they are not partial to age.

It has been overwhelmingly discouraging for those of us who know these girls, hear their stories and encourage their healing, to know there is partiality in the justice system. How do we tell a 16 year old victim they have more to prove, and less protection in the system than the 15 year old victim.

Why does a 16 have to carry the burden of testifying and proving their victimization only to find out it's going to be much harder if they don't have evidence of money exchanged or eye witnesses to support their testimony. Why do we have to explain their trafficker is only going away for a few months on drug charges because the laws are much harder for you to receive the justice you deserve. "Oh and be safe out there when he is released- since he knows you snitched and knows where you live. I hope the same family who was able to protect you from the trafficking is able to keep you safe when he is out."

I can't tell you the number of times a 16 year old has told me they are done sharing their stories with law enforcement, because the only one who suffers is them (the victim). Sadly, I can't argue with them. The amount of evidence they have to provide to show a 35year old man has used, abused and sold them, is absurd. Because they are minors and child abuse is reported through Child Protective Services, these minors are put in more dangerous situations when an investigator confronts their pimp. These traffickers know their families and where they live. When they leave our care they are returned to the same environments they were trafficked out of. Many of them to the same families where they were never protected in the first place.

Consenting to sex is not the issue here and from my experience in working with this population, no one is going to be wrongfully accused of Trafficking based off of consent. A pimps main tool is psychological coercion. These young people will be the first to admit they consented to the relationship. A relationship where they were promised the world and it met their universal need to feel loved and wanted.



Yes they said they will sleep with their friend in order to prove their love, or avoid his threats of hurting her family.

Yes, they believed him when he said he was proud of her and would always be there to take care of her.

Consent is never the issue. These young girls are usually truly “infatuated” with these men. They believe this is real love. What it is, is Trauma Bond, and many will never testify because that bond runs deep. They were promised Happily Ever After, only to find out a short time later they are living a nightmare.

Today, you have an opportunity to stand in the Gap and stop the nightmare. And we have a short window of time in which to do it. I'm sure many of you are parents and have experienced first-hand how fast 18 approaches. When these young people turn 18 and they're out on their own as an adult, the amount of resources and support they have quickly fades. Reality sets in and they are forced to figure out how to navigate this world with the tools they were given as children. They remember moments like these, moments where they were let down, moments when they were not protected, moments when they didn't have a voice and they wonder why living any different or fighting for something different even matters. Consider if this were your child and they were the ones unprotected by the law.

I'm pleading with you, on behalf of these youth, to stand with Senator Fedor and the rest of us, and pass a law that will allow these children to feel the safety and protection they so desperately need and deserve.