

Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
c/o Legislative Information
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

May 6, 2013

Dear Senator Gerzofsky, Representative Dion, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Tim Farris I am a Sergeant with the Portland Police Department and serve as the co-chair of the Greater Portland Coalition Against Sex Trafficking and Exploitation. I am before you today to support LD 1159, "An Act to Address Human Trafficking, Sex Trafficking, and Prostitution."

Approximately 2 years ago I was serving as a Senior Lead Officer in the city when we came across behavior which I now know to be sex trafficking. It came to us through interviews with hotel staff and most importantly through girls involved in the sex trade. We heard many horrible tales of mostly young girls, from Maine, and beyond. Stories of being recruited into the "game" right here in Maine. Stories of being bought and sold between sex traffickers (also known as pimps) multiple times. Stories of being severely beaten, raped, and choked unconscious, at times hoping for death. Reports of cross country "tours" while advertised on various web sites and urban tracks. Commons themes run throughout to include drug debt bondage, violence, human rights violations, and exploitive crimes.

As law enforcement we knew we were not equipped to assist these victims or make viable cases against their traffickers without the victim's assistance and cooperation. We spoke to our partners in the advocacy fields to include various agencies such as domestic violence services and sexual assault services. We learned our community partners were seeing the same trends and hearing the same stories. We learned that they like us had very limited resources and mechanisms to stem the tide of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking, also known as "the game" is about money and our investments were none.

We did our research and looked at the best practices across the nation. We built a coalition based on those best practices. The coalition is the Greater Portland Coalition Against Sex Trafficking and Exploitation. We have over 60 people sitting at the table on a monthly basis. It is a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency collaboration built to attack sex trafficking from many angles to include awareness, education, enforcement, prosecution, and to provide assistance to the victims of sex trafficking.

LD1159 helps us in reaching our goals. It shifts very difficult crimes to interpret and enforce, such as kidnapping and criminal restraint, into sex trafficking crimes that broaden the definition and make it much more user friendly and useful to law enforcement. It increases the accountability for offenders, both the suppliers (traffickers or pimps) and the demand ("johns"). It reframes the "act of prostitution" from the product (prostitutes) but more appropriately on the supply and demand sides of the sex trade.

For these reasons and more, I urge you to support LD 1159. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Sgt. Tim Farris
Portland Police Department
Co-chair GPCASTE