

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
On Senate Consideration of Legislation to Combat Human Trafficking
March 10, 2015**

Holly Austin Smith was just 14 years old when she ran away from home and quickly became a victim of human trafficking. She met a man in a shopping mall who told her she was pretty, and promised he would give her a glamorous life in California. Instead, he sold her for sex. The first man she was sold to commented that she reminded him of his own granddaughter. Despite that human connection, the man then paid \$200 to rape her.

Thankfully, Holly escaped and has rebuilt her life. She is now a fierce advocate to end all forms of human trafficking. But many are not so lucky. The physical and psychological scars of being bought and sold, of being raped multiple times a night by different men, are devastating. This terrible crime destroys lives. As we consider legislation to combat human trafficking, we must remember Holly and the thousands of other vulnerable and victimized children she represents. And we must do everything we can to keep it from happening in the first place.

Last Congress, in 2013, I led the effort to reauthorize the Trafficking Victims Protection Act last Congress. That historic, bipartisan legislation - and the funds it authorized - signaled our country's commitment to ending all forms of human trafficking, both here at home and around the world. I am glad to see the Senate return its attention to this issue. Stories of runaways like Holly make clear we have more work to do.

I support the bill we take up today, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, **but I believe there is more we must do to prevent trafficking in the first place. We must act to protect our young people *before* they become victims.**

The legislation Senator Collins and I have introduced, the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act, seeks to do just that. Homeless and runaway kids are exceptionally vulnerable to human traffickers. A recent survey found that 1 in 4 homeless teens was a victim of sex trafficking or had been forced to provide sex for survival needs.

These vulnerable children, alone and on the street, are 'walking prey'. Human traffickers lurk around bus stops and parks where homeless kids congregate, offer promises of something to eat and a night off the streets. They exploit the sad reality that most of these kids have no place to go. Far too many of our cities have no shelters for kids and those that do face a chronic shortage of beds. As Representative Poe recently said at an event on ending human trafficking, we have more animal shelters in this country than places for young people to find a safe place to sleep.

If we are serious about preventing human trafficking, we must protect these kids. We must provide better outreach to them, more beds for them to sleep in, and more

counseling to get them on the path to a stable life. This prevention will cost money, but it will save lives and prevent the far more costly effects of human trafficking. This is smart money we should be proud to invest in our children. We must include the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act in our efforts here to prevent more of our kids from becoming victims. I look forward to offering our bipartisan legislation as an amendment.

I know that other Senators have amendments they would like to see considered. Senator Corker, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has an important piece of legislation to combat sex and labor trafficking in countries around the world. I thank him for working with me to make some improvements to its funding provisions and I hope this bipartisan legislation will be considered as an amendment by the full Senate.

Senator Klobuchar has been working for years to see her Safe Harbor bill get passed, to make sure that victims are treated as victims and not as criminals. I am proud to cosponsor her bill.

Senator McConnell has long promised a full amendment process so I expect we will have the opportunity to strengthen the underlying bill with a variety of ideas from senators. We owe it to survivors like Holly to pass the strongest bill possible. We must provide the resources desperately needed by those on the front lines protecting young people every day, like those in my home state of Vermont at Spectrum Services and the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Service Providers. We owe it to all the survivors who bravely tell their stories hoping to prevent just one more child from falling prey to this terrible crime.

The Senate must pass a strong, comprehensive bill that includes prevention, prosecution, and services for victims. An editorial in the *New York Times* last week noted that “a consensus is emerging on new initiatives to confront this human-rights problem and help its victims, often runaways or homeless youngsters who have been forced or coerced into prostitution.” I agree, and I look forward to working with every Senator here to ensure we get this done for the American people.

I ask that my full statement and the *New York Times* editorial entitled “Steps Against Juvenile Sex Trafficking” be printed in the Record.

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