

March 21, 2023

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Health & Human Services Committee,

I wanted to sincerely thank all of you for providing time on your agenda to hear SF 1839. I also greatly appreciate our chief author Senator Dibble along with other members of the committee for being supportive of the Safe Harbor and youth survivors of sex trafficking.

I am writing this letter in support of SF 1839 which would provide additional critical resources for some of the most vulnerable people in our state-youth who are being sex trafficked.

My name is Cynthia Terlouw-Kvistad, I am the Founder & Executive Director of Terebinth Refuge. Terebinth Refuge is a Shelter and Transitional program that brings hope, healing services, and a path to Independence & stability to women who are 18 years and older. Since the Safe Harbor, No Wrong Door Model works with victims through the age of 24, we at Terebinth Refuge are a Safe Harbor grantee and have been so since we began in 2017. We have seen many of these survivors, move out of this life of sexual exploitation and trafficking and onto employment and stable living. This is our hope for all survivors!

It goes without saying that Minnesota's children and youth should not be bought and sold for sex. I know it is hard to believe that it happens in our state, but it does. The average age of entry into being trafficked is young - between the ages of 12-14.

Sex trafficking is a horrific issue in our state. In 2019 the Minnesota Student Survey found that 5,000 Minnesota 9th and 11th graders have experienced sexual exploitation. This number is an undercount in that it only represents two grade levels and only the youth who happened to be in school at this time and who felt comfortable enough answering the question.

But there is so much hope in our state for victims of trafficking. You helped us pass our Safe Harbor Law back in 2011 which decriminalizes "prostitution" offenses for youth under the age of 18 and provides safe and trauma informed services, shelter and housing programs to help these incredible young people heal and accomplish the goals they have for themselves. We are so grateful for this amazing progress but our youth need more.

On behalf of the Youth Services Network we are asking for an increase of \$9 million for additional street outreach workers, emergency shelter beds and housing, an additional \$9 million for supportive services such as mental health therapy/CD counseling/educational and vocational programs and an additional \$2 million to expand the Regional Navigator Program. All of these investments would provide our state with the opportunity to get additional victims of sex trafficking into safe and supportive environments where they can heal and accomplish their goals.

We also know that the Safe Harbor Law No Wrong Door Response works. According to the Wilder Research Center Evaluation conducted between 2017 and 2019 there were a total of 1,279 youth served by Safe Harbor funded grantees. 97% of these youth self-reported positive changes in their life after receiving Safe Harbor services, 100% felt more prepared to reach their educational goals and 89% felt more prepared to support themselves in a financially safe way.

Please use some of the surplus to invest in young victims of trafficking's safety and futures.

Thank you all so much for your support of SF 1839.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Terlouw-Kvistad
Founder & Executive Director
Terebinth Refuge