

Testimony

Presented by Tami Brown Rodriguez

Director of Policy, Jaco Booyens Ministries & Family Member of a Survivor

Chairperson and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Tami Brown Rodriguez and I serve as the Director of Policy for JBM, an antitrafficking organization dedicated to protecting children and fighting exploitation. But I am not here only as a policy expert—I am here as a family member of a survivor.

My niece—Dakota, if preferred] was trafficked for 15 years. Groomed in her own school, in what should have been a place of safety, she was systematically exploited, manipulated, and sold—while the laws that should have protected her failed to stop it. Her story is not unique. Traffickers are highly organized, operating in the shadows, adapting to our weaknesses in enforcement. And right now, Minnesota's laws are weak—making this state a target.

The Reality of Trafficking in Minnesota

Traffickers seek out jurisdictions with weak enforcement and lenient penalties—because they know they can exploit children with little risk.

- In states where penalties are strictly enforced, child exploitation rates drop.
- In states where consequences are minimal, exploitation rises—by as much as 50% year over year.

Right now, Minnesota is not doing enough to deter these criminals. Predators are riskaverse. They weigh the odds of being caught and the severity of punishment. When the law is lenient, they grow bolder. They target more children. They operate with impunity.

The Cost of Weak Laws

For every one year a child is trafficked, it takes, on average, three years for them to begin rebuilding their life—if they ever fully recover. The trauma is lifelong. Many never escape the mental, physical, and emotional toll of their abuse.

But the burden of prevention should not be on the victims. It is our responsibility—as lawmakers, advocates, and citizens—to make Minnesota a place where traffickers fear operating and where survivors have a path to justice and healing.

The Moral Obligation to Act

We cannot allow another child to endure what my [niece, sister, cousin] went through. We cannot allow traffickers to operate freely in our communities. And we must send an unmistakable message:

- If you traffic children in Minnesota, you will be caught.
- If you exploit the vulnerable, you will face severe consequences.
- If you harm a child, the law will not protect you—justice will find you.

Stronger laws save lives. I urge this committee to act swiftly and decisively. We have a duty—not just to survivors, but to every child in this state—to ensure Minnesota is not a safe haven for traffickers, but a state that leads the fight against them.

Thank you,
Tami Brown Rodriguez