

March 27, 2023

Chair Pinto and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN. 55155

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the Children & Families Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of HF 1858 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 Bukola Oriola, Executive Director of The Enitan Story, a survivor-led nonprofit organization with a mission to advocate for victims and empower survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence.

We are also a Safe Harbor grantee providing culturally responsive direct services to youth who have experienced sex trafficking or sexual exploitation in Minnesota through the state's Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response. Although we are based in Fridley, we serve victims of sex trafficking from all areas of the state-inner city, suburbs, rural areas and tribal communities because, unfortunately, sex trafficking is happening in all of these communities.

I also served on the U.S. Advisory Council on Human trafficking for two consecutive terms under President Obama and President Trump's administrations to provide recommendations using the lived experience subject matter expert to help meet the needs of individuals who have experienced sex or labor trafficking in the U.S. and specifically in the state of Minnesota. In addition, I provide subject matter expertise to the MN DHS Child Safety and Prevention Unit of the Human Trafficking Child Protection Program.

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. We see this at The Link everyday and currently have youth this young in our emergency shelter for sex trafficking victims as we speak.

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. The Link served 158 unduplicated youth victims of sex trafficking in 2022 and we are just one of many Safe Harbor funded grantees across the state.

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.

Please use some of the surplus to invest in their safety and futures and support of HF 1858.

Sincerely,



Bukola Oriola

Executive Director, The Enitan Story/ Former Member, U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking