

March 28, 2023

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

I am writing this letter of support for HF 1858 which would provide additional critical resources for thousands of youths in Minnesota who are being sex bought and sold for sex. In our state, the average age of entry into sex trafficking is between 12 and 14 years old. In 2011, you helped pass our Safe Harbor Law back which decriminalizes “prostitution” offenses for youth under the age of 18 and provides safe and trauma-informed services, shelter and housing programs for child sex trafficking victims. I am grateful for this law, at the same time, our youth need more.

On behalf of the Youth Services Network, I am 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.

In 2019 the [MDH Minnesota Student Survey](#) found that 5,000 ninth and eleventh graders in Minnesota have experienced sexual exploitation, with boys and girls almost evenly impacted. This number 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.

“This alarming study shows there are many young people all across the state who need protection from sexual exploitation,” said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm. “We must do more to connect with youth through our Safe Harbor program, educational programs and other efforts providing them with financial security and safe homes.”

In 2020, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office contracted the Sexual Violence Justice Institute at the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (SVJI at MNCASA) to develop [Safe Harbor Protocol Guidelines](#) that could be utilized by communities across the state of Minnesota. The guidelines represent the collective expertise of over 200 professionals and practitioners with on-the-ground experience and knowledge about the best practices for responding to the needs of sexually exploited youth. According to the latest biennial [Wilder Research Center Evaluation of the Safe Harbor Initiative](#), 97% of 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 invest \$20 million of the State’s \$17.5 billion surplus to the safety and futures of young sex trafficking victims.

Sincerely,
Artika Roller, Executive Director
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault