

## Jaco Boooyens Testimony

Today, I present my testimony as the founder of JBM, an anti-trafficking organization with 30 years of experience in combating child exploitation and human trafficking. My testimony emphasizes the critical need to strengthen penalties within human trafficking and child sexual abuse laws. It is vital that we understand the significant impact appropriate penalties will have on the landscape of child exploitation. Historically, in regions where penalties are rigorously enforced, we have witnessed a notable decline in child exploitation. Conversely, when criminal enterprises exploit children in areas where legal consequences are weak, these enterprises become more brazen, resulting in a sharp increase in the exploitation of children—often as high as a 50% year-on-year rise.

By nature, predators are risk-averse, which is why they invest significant time in deceiving and targeting potential victims. Enforcing stricter penalties increases the risks for predators, heightening the potential for their apprehension and the loss of their freedom and livelihood. The criminal enterprise engaged in child exploitation is often a highly informed and, at times, coordinated network. Therefore, it is imperative that state and local governments implement stringent penalties for crimes that harm children, and ensure that these penalties are fully enforced in accordance with the law.

We believe it is our duty as American citizens to protect our children and steward our freedom by creating an environment where children can grow up in innocence, free from the devastating trauma of exploitation. As Edmund Burke once said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” In this instance, we can take action. By enforcing robust, justifiable penalties for the exploitation of children, and ensuring that these penalties are executed to the fullest extent of the law, we can significantly reduce child exploitation in Minnesota and across our nation.

There is no doubt that any form of sexual trauma or exploitation inflicted upon a child severely impedes their well-being and future development. Historical evidence indicates that rebuilding the life of a child who has been exploited requires, on average, three times the amount of time that the exploitation itself lasted. We currently live in a society where those who seek to harm children do so with impunity, unafraid of facing consequences for their malicious actions.

Minnesota now has a profound opportunity to take a stand—to prioritize the well-being of children and to send a clear message to those who would exploit them that they will not be allowed free rein in this state. Instead, those who seek to protect the innocent, through policy and legislation, can pave the way for justice and ensure that our children are safe from exploitation.

Thank you, and may God bless you.

Jaco Booyens