

U.S. House of Representatives
Homeland Security Committee

Task Force on Enhancing Security
for
Special Events in the United States

A Scourge Against Humanity: Addressing Human Trafficking at Mass Gatherings

December 17, 2025

Testimony of:

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Thank you, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and Members of the Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States, for inviting me to speak at this important hearing on human trafficking at mass gatherings.

My name is Yasmin Vafa and I am the Executive Director of Rights4Girls, a national organization dedicated to ending violence against vulnerable young women and girls in the United States. We work alongside survivors to strengthen state and federal laws, advance research, provide training to judges and systems professionals, and conduct public awareness campaigns to dismantle the conditions that enable exploitation. Our mission is simple: to ensure every girl can grow up safe and free from violence.

This hearing could not be more timely. Over the next several years, the United States will host some of the world's largest sporting events—including the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and the 2031 FIFA Women's World Cup. These events bring complex security challenges, and among them, the humanitarian crisis of human trafficking must be a chief concern.

Trafficking Is Already Here—and Happens with Impunity

Sex trafficking is not a distant threat that appears only during major events. It exists today in every community across this country—rural, suburban, tribal, and urban. Vulnerable people, primarily women and children, are bought and sold for profit and pleasure, often with near total impunity. A recent *New York Times* investigation exposed the brutal reality on Los Angeles's Figueroa Street, where child sex trafficking persists openly.¹

Girls like **Ana**, who was first trafficked on Figueroa at age 13 alongside her 11-year-old sister. Today, at 19—missing her front teeth and living with an ostomy bag—she is still forced to meet a \$1,200 daily quota or face violent punishment at the hands of her exploiter.² Her story reflects the trauma endured by countless women and girls in the sex trade.

The data is stark:

- **Over 90%** of women in the sex trade report being shot, raped, strangled, or beaten—often at the hands of sex buyers.³
- They face a **mortality rate 200 times higher** than the general population.⁴
- **68%** suffer PTSD at levels comparable to combat veterans.⁵

These harms predate and outlast any special event. But when you add the mass influx of tourists, temporary anonymity, and large numbers of men with disposable income, the risk of trafficking and exploitation intensifies dramatically.

Major Events Create a Temporary Market Where Trafficking Thrives

Events like the World Cup, Olympics, March Madness, or the Super Bowl create a perfect storm: increased hotel bookings, short-term rentals, rideshares, and festivities—along with a surge in the commercial sex market. While sex buying happens daily across America, major events concentrate the demand, making exploitation easier and more profitable.

History bears this out:

- During one **Final Four weekend** in Minneapolis, law enforcement arrested **47 men** for felony solicitation of a minor, **11 for trafficking or promoting prostitution**, and recovered **28 trafficking victims**, including a child.⁶
- During an **MLB All-Star Game** in Cleveland, **49 people** were arrested, including **28 men seeking sex with children**.⁷
- Before **Super Bowl LIII** in Atlanta, **26 traffickers** and **34 men attempting to buy sex with children** were arrested, and multiple child victims were recovered.⁸
- In Phoenix in 2023, police made roughly **50 felony arrests** tied to trafficking during **Super Bowl LVI**.⁹

The pattern is unmistakable: **where demand spikes, traffickers follow.**

Addressing the Real Driver: Demand

Recognizing the clear link between sex buying and exploitation, Rights4Girls launched our **Sex Buying Isn't a Game** national billboard campaign in eight states hosting the NCAA March Madness games and MLB All-Star Game. The campaign exposes the often invisible role of sex buyers in fueling sex trafficking and seeks to disrupt demand. During the 2025 NCAA Final Four in San Antonio—while our campaign was running—**eight trafficking victims were recovered**,¹⁰ underscoring the need for proactive awareness and deterrence—and illustrating what can be accomplished when NGOs, the media, and law enforcement come together.

We must remember: the sex trade is a **multi-billion-dollar industry funded entirely by sex buyers**. Without buyers, there is no business. Our recent report, **Buyers Unmasked**, analyzed hundreds of posts from online hobby boards—essentially Yelp pages for prostitution—and reveals a culture of dehumanization, indifference, and entitlement that traffickers rely on.¹¹

One survivor told us she spent **six months at age 16** trying to tell her buyers she was being trafficked against her will. **Not one buyer helped her**. Every man prioritized his own protection or the money he had already paid.

This is the norm—not the exception.

As one buyer in our report openly stated, the goal is:

“Find them, f* them, forget them. This is the gold standard for men's spiritual health.”¹²

This mindset is the invisible engine of trafficking at mass gatherings.

Policy Must Focus on the Source of the Harm

If we are serious about preventing trafficking during major events—and year-round—our policies must address the true driver of this harm: the demand created by sex buyers.

To that end, we recommend:

1. Target the Demand

Prioritize deterrence operations focused on sex buyers during large events as a form of trafficking and violence prevention. To ensure the prevention of sex trafficking year-round, we must mandate that all federally-funded programs to reduce human trafficking include demand reduction tactics. We have seen the success of these approaches in other jurisdictions across the U.S. and the globe.

2. Support Survivors

Ensure that recovered victims are never criminalized and are immediately connected to comprehensive, trauma-informed services, whether they be children or adults. We must remember that many of the adults in the sex trade today, are the child sex trafficking victims of yesterday who have merely come of age in this industry and are in need of the same services and support.

3. Promote Accountability

Pass and enforce laws that hold all exploiters accountable, both sex buyers and traffickers—using buyer fines to fund survivor services, mandating buyer accountability programs that shift mindsets and culture, and enhancing penalties against those driving the sex trafficking market. It is crucial to hold all exploiters accountable for the devastating harm they inflict on victims and our communities.

Just this year, Rights4Girls worked with survivors and partners to pass laws in states like California¹³ and New Hampshire¹⁴ increasing penalties on buyers and generating funding for survivors. The models exist. What we need now is the political will to implement them.

A Call to Action

When the stadium lights dim and fans pour into the streets, no woman, no child, and no member of the surrounding community should be treated as entertainment or collateral damage.

These global events present an opportunity—not only to protect potential victims, but to expose the reality of sex-buying and the role it plays in fueling this multi-billion-dollar industry. Our report, **Buyers Unmasked**, lays bare the attitudes and actions of sex buyers in their own words. Their statements shatter the false narrative that buying sex is a victimless act. What emerges instead is a pattern of misogyny, dehumanization, and deliberate disregard for signs of coercion, vulnerability, and desperation.

The evidence is clear. The solutions are known. What remains is our courage to act.

Thank you for your attention and your commitment to protecting the most vulnerable among us.

¹ *Can Anyone Rescue the Trafficked Girls of L.A.'s Figueroa Street?*, N.Y. Times (Oct. 26, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/26/magazine/sex-trafficking-girls-la-figueroa.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Jody Raphael and Katie Feifer, “Get the Facts: What We Know about Sex Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution in the United States,” (World Without Exploitation, January 2020),

<https://www.equalitymodelus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Get-the-FactsJanuary-2020.pdf>.

⁴ John J. Potterat et al., “Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women,” *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 159, no. 8 (April 15, 2004): 778–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwh110>.

⁵ Melissa Farley et al., “Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2, no. 3–4 (2004): 33–74, https://doi.org/10.1300/J189v02n03_03.

⁶ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *Twin Cities-area child sex trafficking sting nets 47 arrests during ‘Final Four’ weekend* (Apr. 10, 2019), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/twin-cities-area-child-sex-trafficking-sting-nets-47-arrests-during-final-four>.

⁷ Associated Press, *Authorities: 49 arrests on sex counts during All-Star week* (Jul. 11, 2019),

<https://apnews.com/general-news-a41d30bce6c149a1abfde006224853fb>.

⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigations, *FBI announces results of human trafficking operation for Super Bowl LIII* (Feb. 5, 2019), <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/atlanta/news/press-releases/fbi-announces-results-of-human-trafficking-operation-for-sbliii>.

⁹ AZ Central, *Sex trafficking sting operation in Arizona during Super Bowl leads to multiple arrests* (Feb. 26, 2023), <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2023/02/26/multiple-arrests-made-in-sex-trafficking-sting-during-super-bowl/69942519007/>.

¹⁰ Associated Press, *Human Trafficking in San Antonio During Final Four a Real Problem, Officials Say*, KENS 5 (Apr. 6, 2018), <https://www.kens5.com/article/news/crime/final-four-human-trafficking-san-antonio-arrests/273-6f774742-f1e6-4856-83cf-3d2becb7bff4>.

¹¹ Rights4Girls, *Buyers Unmasked: Exposing the Men Who Buy Sex & Solutions to End Exploitation* (Jan. 2025), <https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Buyers-Unmasked-02122025.pdf>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ California AB 379, <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB379/id/3263490>.

¹⁴ New Hampshire SB 267, <https://legiscan.com/NH/text/SB267/id/3159427>.