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Before the

Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

United States House of Representatives

Hearing entitled

“Latest Developments in Combating Online Sex Trafficking”

November 30, 2017

Chairman Blackburn, Ranking Member Doyle, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing. It is an honor to offer testimony on the impact of technology on human trafficking victims and survivors. The short answer is that technology compounds, exposes and illuminates the victimization and violence against trafficking victims. The sexual exploitation perpetrated against people in the commercial sex industry is all across the internet. There is no place for survivors of human trafficking to hide, because their victimization has been put on display for the world to see. That public victimization exponentially complicates the healing process.

Years ago, I met two teenage girls from Atlanta. They were deceived by a girl they thought was a friend, ended up with a trafficker, in a car with child safety locks, and driven to Nashville. This

man got a hotel room, popped an ad up online and was in business within half an hour. I was struck with how easy it was for him to sell girls— as easy as advertising a bicycle or car for sale. I was struck with how quickly men arranged to have sex with young people—as fast as ordering a pizza. In the ensuing years, I've heard variations of this story hundreds of times. Three out of four survivors we serve have been advertised online. Others have been recruited and groomed on-line.

Thankfully, an undercover detective was answering online ads that day, posing as a John. He came to the girl's room and ended their exploitation within days of its start. They were the lucky ones. Once recovered, survivors face threats from predators online who are waiting for them to surface. Especially in the early days of recovery, monitoring online activity is more challenging for us than monitoring phone usage. There are temptations, dangers and master manipulators ready to entice victims back with the promise of a dream that becomes a nightmare.

When the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) began a proactive attack on human traffickers, they called us at End Slavery Tennessee for assistance. That partnership had two initial prongs. First, they asked for help in understanding the technology landscape and how it affected trafficking victims. How were victims recruited, bought and sold across the internet? They needed first-hand information, and one of our young survivors was willing to tell them all she knew about being trafficked online.

Second, the TBI wanted a more direct partnership during the undercover operations. That meant our survivor intervention specialist and case manager were on site during operations. When TBI identified a victim, she met with End Slavery Tennessee staff. These young women were offered services and a way out of exploitation. Some took the offer, some did not. They left with the

understanding that the offer didn't have an expiration date. The goal was to turn that very scary and often negative interaction with law enforcement into one of hope.

Once a survivor comes into care at End Slavery Tennessee, the plan of care often depends on drug addiction, prior victimization, length of time enslaved and the age of the victim. We have provided care and services to survivors from four to fifty-two years old, with a primary focus on minors through age twenty-five, and in eight languages. In the past five years, we have gone from operating out of one ten-by-ten foot office to a small suite of offices, to now a Care Center and three safe houses. We currently care for about 190 survivors per year in Nashville and the surrounding area.

Survivors need a plethora of wrap around services to meet their every need. Because trafficking victims suffer complex post-traumatic stress disorder, the restorative process can last years. To compound the trauma of trafficking, most victims were abused as children or suffered from a range of other adverse childhood effects which made them vulnerable to exploitation in the first place. It is essential that an agency offer case management and a comprehensive array of specialized services until a survivor is ready to lead a stable and productive life.

In Tennessee, we use a single point of entry model, with one agency in each of the four regions of Tennessee whose entire focus is on providing intensive case management and the restoration of human trafficking victims. Together, we formed the Tennessee Anti-Slavery Alliance. This approach ensures that quality, consistent, trauma-informed services are provided statewide in the most effective and efficient way possible and that victims don't fall between the cracks, as often happens when systems of communication and collaboration are not in place. Survivors shouldn't have care options only in our large cities. We should meet their needs wherever they are.

About End Slavery Tennessee

The mission of End Slavery Tennessee is to promote healing of human trafficking survivors and strategically confront slavery in our state with a vision to create a slave-free Tennessee. To accomplish this, we use the T.A.A.P. method. This method includes focus by End Slavery on Training, Aftercare, Advocacy and Prevention.

Training - As experts in the field we train over 11,000 professionals and community members each year, equipping first responders to identify victims of human trafficking and have a broader sphere of influence in their field.

Aftercare - We provide all survivors of any kind of human trafficking long term, comprehensive, specialized, trauma-informed aftercare through both in- house services and other community service providers.

Advocacy – We work successfully on the local, state and national level to create effective collaboration and communication; accomplishing systemic change and influencing policy and laws.

Prevention – We facilitate specialized groups to keep vulnerable youth safer, address the demand through interactive curriculum and equip the general population through innovative strategies and resources to prevent exploitation.

More information can be found at endslaverytn.org.