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SENIOR WHIP  
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**CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS**

*Ranking Member*  
*House Judiciary Committee*  
*Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism,*  
*Homeland Security, and Investigations*

**HEARING**  
**COMBATING CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN:**  
**ASSESSING THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM,**  
**HOMELAND SECURITY, AND**  
**INVESTIGATIONS**



**MARCH 16, 2017**

- Mr. Chairman, I commend you for holding our first Subcommittee hearing of this Congress on this important issue.
- Child sexual exploitation is an urgent problem, impacting every community across the country.
- We must fight for all of the children in this country; they are precious gifts to be cherished, nurtured, and protected.
- Despite the difficult subject matter, I am optimistic about today's hearing.
- I expect that we will discuss the magnitude of the threats to our children; the movement to combat, prevent, and eradicate the victimization of our children; the many agencies, organizations, and individuals involved in the battle; and the legislation that supports them.
- I hope that this hearing will help us determine if we are doing the best we can legislatively or if there is more that we can do.
- At present, the *Adam Walsh Act* and the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* encompass investigation, enforcement, prevention, prosecution, punishment, management of offenders, and victim services.

- These laws encourage collaboration between local, state, and federal law enforcement and provide a comprehensive platform that addresses the many interrelated issues involved in crimes against children.
- As some of you may already know, the state of Texas has been experiencing almost epidemic levels of child sex trafficking.
- My Republican colleague, Mr. Poe, and I have worked together to bring attention to the condition of our state and search for solutions.
- Some estimate that 80,000 child sex trafficking victims are in Texas alone.
- Children between the ages of 11 and 17 can be found soliciting sex on the streets of Houston.
- Fortunately, Texas has many agencies and organizations, working tirelessly along with federal agencies, to rescue victims and prosecute those who force them into prostitution through threats, violence, intimidation, and trickery.
- In two and a half years, almost 200 individuals were arrested on allegations of forcing children into sex work in Harris and Dallas counties.

- Operation Cross Country X, led by the FBI's Innocence Lost Initiative, resulted in the arrests of 239 pimps in 3 days and the rescue of 80 children, including 3 from Houston.
- Just last month, a judge in the Southern District of Texas sentenced a man to 18 years in prison for promoting the prostitution of a 17 year-old girl (Project Safe Childhood of the Department of Justice prosecuted the case).
- This man collected all of the money earned for sex acts performed by the girl and controlled her with physical violence—ads for the girl were posted on backpage.com.
- This case illustrates the challenges of dealing with those who would misuse the Internet, a great technological achievement, to harm our children.
- Children are being victimized using cell phones, social media, and video gaming chat rooms, while the largest marketplace for buying and selling children in the United States exists on the internet.
- 63% of underage sex trafficking victims said they were advertised or sold online, and child pornography images are shared more easily and quickly on the Internet.

- The ICAC Task Force program and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children are dedicated to finding these people and bringing them to justice.
- In fact, Texas has three separate federally funded Internet Crimes against Children Task Forces that make it harder to victimize our children on the internet.
- Last year, Operation Broken Heart III, a two-month operation, conducted by the Houston Metro Task Force and several Houston-area law enforcement agencies, led to the arrests of 126 sexual predators.
- As these agencies continue to fight for our children, we must stand with them by providing the support they need and continuing to find more effective solutions to this problem.
- In keeping with our obligation, we must also make sure that victims and their families receive necessary aftercare services and that offenders are not able to reoffend.
- According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 21% of all paroled sex offenders in Texas reside in Harris County.

- There are registration requirements designed to keep track of their whereabouts, but these systems are not without problems of their own.
- Organizations, such as the Human Rights Watch have raised awareness concerning the many child-offenders who are often victims of sexual assault themselves who are placed on sex offender registries, due to absolute mandates.
- In 39 states, laws exist that require children as young as 8 years old to be placed on sex offender registries, often for life, when adjudicated of what the courts deem sexual crimes.
- Since this practice began in the '90s, decades of research have proven that placing youth on registries is not just ineffective but harmful to all parties involved.
- While registration and notification sentences marginalize and label youth, they do nothing to benefit society or protect children from future sexual harm.
- We must examine these issues and the reasons most states have been unable to comply with the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act.
- Some reasons are practical and others are based on principle.

- The nation has reached a turning point in the way the criminal justice system views young people, who for decades were little more than an afterthought, treated simply like miniature adults.
- In search of real solutions we must guard against creating solutions even worse than the problems they seek to resolve.
- We must seek to uplift all of our children rather than stop at merely labeling them and throwing away the key.
- I trust that Ms. Nicole Pittman, one of our witnesses today, will be able to shed some light on this issue.
- We are fortunate to have the opportunity today to hear from a panel of witnesses who have extensive experience with all of these issues relating to the criminal exploitation of our children.
- Until we put a stop to this victimization, we will continue to search for solutions.
- Thank you.