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**CHILDREN & YOUTH**  
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*Testimony by:*

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*Before the:*

**United States House Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Human Resources**

*For the hearing:*

**Protecting Vulnerable Children:  
Preventing & Addressing Sex Trafficking of Youth in Foster Care  
October 23, 2013**

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**Center for Children & Youth Justice, statement for the record – U.S. House Subcommittee on Human Resources  
of the Committee on Ways and Means**

Mr. Chairman Reichert, Ranking Member Doggett, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting my testimony today. It is an honor to participate in this discussion of the ways in which we can prevent, effectively intervene, and ultimately eradicate the commercial sexual exploitation of vulnerable children in our communities, especially those in our foster care system.

I am Bobbe Bridge, Founding President and CEO of the Center for Children & Youth Justice. The Center (informally known as "CCYJ") was established in 2006 in recognition that the State and its agencies had been too often and for too long failing "system kids" – children and youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. CCYJ's mission is to advance justice for and to enhance the lives of children and youth through juvenile justice, child welfare and related systems reform. CCYJ is dedicated to meaningful, lasting change in Washington's child welfare and juvenile justice systems to ensure that the lives of children and youth who come to those systems are enriched rather than harmed as a result of their experience in care. CCYJ's vision is that, through research, policy change and best practices, more children and youth will be diverted from entering these systems in the first place. Those who do become involved in these systems will find that they work in coordination with each other, are staffed by highly-skilled practitioners who utilize evidence-based practices, and are informed by youth voices in an environment of fair and unbiased decision-making.

Prior to founding CCYJ, I was a trial judge in the King County Superior Court for ten years, during which time I presided over 100's of child abuse and neglect and juvenile delinquency cases. During my eight years of service as an Associate Justice of the Washington State Supreme Court, I reviewed these cases and also became involved in system change efforts in child welfare - first as the chair of the Committee for the Domestic Violence-Child Maltreatment Coordinated Response Project and later as co-chair of the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care. I continue to serve on the Commission with my co-chair, the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Service for the Children's Administration, Washington's child welfare agency. The Commission was established in recognition that collaboration will assure that systemic improvements are sought, achieved, and sustained beyond the terms of office of individual members of the judiciary, agency directors, and elected officials. Its members include judges, legislators, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Attorney General and Director of the Office of Public Defense, the Director of the Office of Civil Legal Needs, the Directors of CASA and the Foster Parents Association of WA, the Chief Judge of the NW Intertribal Court System, a young person currently in foster care, an alumnus of foster care, and a parent veteran of the foster care system. Working together in concert, the Commission monitors and reports

on the extent to which child welfare programs and courts are responsive to the needs of the children in their joint care; makes recommendations for systemic improvements; and broadens public awareness of and support for meeting the needs of vulnerable children and families.

As you can see from this brief example of my own experience, Washington State has a robust history of collaboration, both cross-discipline and cross-system, in child welfare. That history has resulted in a number of changes in practice in our child welfare system that has resulted in better outcomes for our children and youth in foster care. Today, others will address the direct service challenges that are presented by the information that is coming to us regarding the extent to which children who are or have been in the foster care system are becoming victims of sex trafficking. Building on the Washington State experience, I would like to focus my time on describing systemic approaches that may prove valuable in our response to this reality and to address the subcommittee's request for suggestions as to the ways in which Federal laws, policies, and resources might be improved to better ensure the safety and well-being of youth who are victims of abuse through sex trafficking.

### **The Washington State Model Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC)**

Washington State was relatively early among state governments to recognize that trafficking in persons, whether domestically or internationally, was an issue of statewide significance. The Task Force Against Trafficking of Persons was created by the legislature in 2002, and in 2003 Washington became the first state in the nation to prohibit trafficking in persons. Over the decade that followed, a host of legislation was passed to address the prosecution of those who were perpetrators or facilitators of sex trafficking and to ensure a degree of "safe harbor" for those being trafficked. More recently, a growing public awareness has led to numerous community-based organizations and advocacy groups looking to prevent/intervene to rescue the child victims of these crimes. The term "child prostitute" has been all but removed from our lexicon. Instead, we refer to the children and youth who are the victims of sex trafficking as commercially sexually exploited youth ("CSEC").

Yet the more we learn, the less we know: about how to identify CSEC; about the numbers of youth who are vulnerable for being trafficked; about the various means of trafficking (gang activity, individual procurer, family involvement, internet); about the best and most effective practices to prevent children from being sexually exploited; about the best and most effective practices to intervene – to rescue- a

child who has been trafficked. But what we do know is that by bringing professionals from the various systems that interact with those who either are or who are at risk of becoming CSEC together with survivor and community voices, in authentic collaborative and coordinated responses, we are more likely to create successful outcomes for these children. The State of Washington is in the process of implementing such a collaborative model.

### **Project Respect**

Project Respect is the working title for the CCYJ-led project which has resulted in the development of the Washington State Model Protocol. The purpose of the Project is to implement a statewide coordinated response to identify, engage and better serve commercially sexually exploited children and youth in Washington State. With funding from the State Interdisciplinary Task Force on Children and private philanthropy, the Project is now in its second year. During the first year, research was conducted on best practices nationally and interviews with key informants, including both professionals and survivors, were completed. Local summits were held at the county level in six different locations throughout the state to engage community leaders in discussing the context of CSEC in their community, the responses that were currently being used, the gaps in data and services, and exploration of what the components of a model response protocol should include. During this process significant consensus was evident as to both the controlling values that would guide the protocol and in the belief that, based upon experience, such a protocol would enhance the effectiveness of addressing and ultimately eradicating CSEC. Each summit included law enforcement, prosecuting and defense attorneys, judges, juvenile detention personal, community service providers, advocates, educators, and child welfare workers and administrators. With the results of this effort, a draft protocol was prepared and vetted to a summit of statewide leadership. In all, over 200 people participated in the development of the Protocol.

This year, working together with our partner YouthCare, five sites (some multi-county) have been trained on the Protocol and on best practices in working with CSEC. They will begin establishing a baseline of current numbers of CSEC in their areas with the use of a CSEC identification tool that has been developed by Dr. Debra Boyer. Case files from child welfare, community service providers, and the courts will be reviewed to identify CSEC according to risk factors and warning signs, whether or not the youth has disclosed involvement in trafficking or prosecuted for prostitution. The numbers established will help these communities to determine whether the responses that they take to address CSEC actually make a difference, i.e., are they identifying more youth? Are the youth being served effectively?

Also during this year, the Washington State Center for Court Research of the Administrative Office of the Courts is leading an effort to work with stakeholders and the pilot sites to develop a data collection plan involving law enforcement, courts, child welfare, and service providers. The group is determining what CSEC data is being collected currently and by whom, and will address the very real need for a consistent set of definitions and collection activities for this population. Ultimately, we hope that the data collected would not only inform local practice but would be merged into a uniform database that would be the basis to assess prevalence, effectiveness of interventions and to identify resource gaps.

### **The CSEC Model Protocol**

The mission of the CSEC Model Protocol is to foster collaboration and coordination among agencies and community to improve the capacity to identify CSEC and to provide safety and services for them and their families/caregivers, as appropriate, as they work to end their exploitation and to hold their exploiters accountable. Those in this effort will use best practices and will rely on data and evidence to drive system and policy improvement.

The core values of the Model Protocol are that:

1. Sexually exploited youth are victims of crime and should not be viewed or treated as criminals
2. Our response fosters regional coordination and relationship-building within and across systems, and is an intentional process for different systems to interact, network, and form regional alliances
3. We meet youth where they are with accessible services based on their individual needs
4. Individually and collectively our first, foremost and sustaining objective is victim safety
5. All children deserve a safe, warm, nurturing environment, independent of their behavior

The Model Protocol is a template, designed to be adapted to local circumstances. That said, the values and mission are universal. The Model Protocol proposes a governance structure which includes a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) for response to individual cases, a Task Force to support and encourage the collaborative effort and whose membership is committed to together providing comprehensive services, to evaluation of effectiveness of practices, collecting and reviewing data, conducting case reviews from the MDT's to discern trends, resource sharing, policy advocacy, public education and awareness, and

problem-solving. All of the Task Force commitments and duties are to be addressed in memoranda of understanding – public statements of commitment and guides for defining roles and responsibilities (and clarifying expectations), accountability and sustainability. Strong and passionate leadership is important but achieving the goal of eradicating CSEC in our communities will require an institutional, formal commitment to the goal.

The Protocol identifies best practices which are recommended but which may be adapted according to the needs of CSEC in the community. Training is set forth as a common and necessary element – training for all members of the MDT's and of the Task Force – training for all professional stakeholders. A CSEC assessment tool that was developed by Dr. Emily Salisbury of Portland State University is included. Practice tips are provided for local law enforcement, community-based advocates, agencies serving youth, child welfare workers, prosecutors, and defense attorneys. The Protocol recommends inclusion of families and caregivers in service planning, when appropriate. It suggests the designation of a detention alternative for law enforcement to use when encountering CSEC. Expressing the view heard from interviews with CSEC survivors, the Protocol recommends that an advocate be assigned to the CSEC by the MDT and that the advocate remains a constant source of support for the CSEC whatever the course of services or legal proceedings may run. Finally, the Protocol recommends that services to the CSEC be culturally sensitive and appropriate.

The progress of the protocols and the policy implications of the work at the local sites will be reviewed by the newly created Washington State CSEC Coordinating Committee. Established by the legislature in the 2013 legislative session, the Committee is convened by Washington's Attorney General. Its membership includes leadership from all three branches of government, law enforcement, education, service providers, the local Task Force chairs, the Office of Public Defense, and the child welfare department (Children's Administration).

## **Opportunities for Federal Engagement in Assuring the Safety and Well-Being of CSEC From or In Foster Care**

Lessons learned from the experience in Washington State – lessons learned from interventions with CSEC who have not been part of the child welfare system – combine to provide some insight into promising systemic actions that could be undertaken by this subcommittee. I list them here, not necessarily in order of priority.

1. Providing guidelines, direction, and resources for the cooperative and consistent collection of data on the prevalence of CSEC – their pathway to becoming a trafficking victim and to effective practices for prevention and intervention.
2. Providing guidance and incentives for collaboration and cooperation at both state and local levels to develop model protocols for improving response to CSEC. Critical here is the necessary participation of the state and regional child welfare agency at its highest level.
3. Providing direction and incentives to state child welfare agencies to focus on children missing from care and to recruit and train specialized foster homes to receive those who are found to be CSEC safe and stable housing should be made available to those for whom independent living is the best option.
4. Providing specific resources through the Court Improvement Act for judicial training in identification of CSEC and for advocates as a resource to the courts when a foster child is identified as CSEC.
5. Providing training to child welfare workers on identification of CSEC (including special assessment tools) and casework practices that reduce running from care, e.g., involving youth in their permanency or independent living plan, normalizing their foster care experience in developmentally appropriate ways, and ensuring that foster youth are developing relationships with caring adults that are sustainable over time (including on transition from care).
6. Mandating changes in state child welfare laws so as to include a trafficked child in the definition of abused child.

## Conclusion

I thank you for this opportunity to be a part of finding solutions to the sex trafficking of youth in foster care. On behalf of CCYJ, I would submit that whatever efforts which we undertake to address the proliferation of sex trafficking of our foster and former foster youth should be research-based, collaborative, coordinated, data driven, and sustainable. These efforts should focus on identification and support of the victims and must recognize that this is a crime of mobility which requires a unified and consistent response – a response that does not merely move the incidence from one neighborhood, one county, one state, to another. Ultimately, of course, there must be a change in our culture, a culture which now implicitly tolerates this activity and which rarely imposes a negative consequence on its consumers.



CASE STATEMENT

# Project Respect

## Helping Children Forced into Prostitution

Prostituted children - also known as commercially sexually exploited children and youth – have been present in Washington State for many years. The largest concentration of these young victims (mostly girls) is found in metropolitan Seattle (King County); Tacoma (Pierce County); and, Everett (Snohomish County). A 2008 Seattle Human Services Department report estimates that 300 - 500 children – **some as young as 11** - are being forced into prostitution in King County at any given time.

The majority of these young victims come from homes where they were physically or sexually abused or neglected. Vulnerable, alone and often homeless they are lured and manipulated into prostitution by pimps who promise them shelter and safety, love and acceptance, only to prey on their fragility and youth.

**It's Time to Change That.**



### PROJECT RESPECT

#### Providing a Consistent and Human Response for Sexually Exploited Children.

Until now, no statewide standard has existed when prostituted youth are arrested or identified. Lacking a standard response, law enforcement, the courts and other “first responders” may unintentionally perpetuate the problem thereby offering little hope to these young victims.

In partnership with 150 stakeholders from across the state, **the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ)** is coordinating the effort to create a model protocol and to provide training and technical assistance that will help responders and providers know how to identify, engage and better serve prostituted youth.

For the first time in Washington State history, judges; prosecutors; defense attorneys; detention and probation personnel; CPS workers; schools; providers; and others are working together towards a solution that is compassionate and consistent.

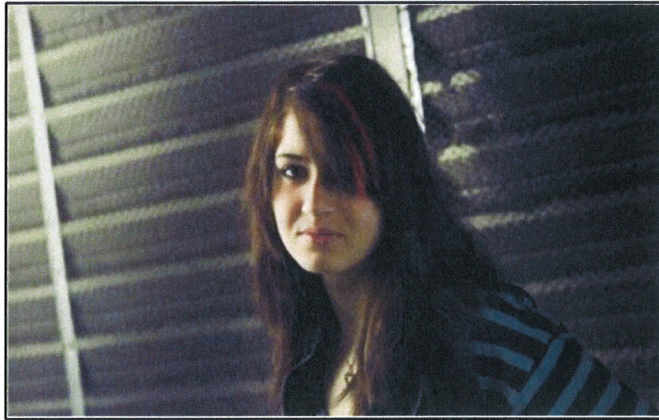
Once completed, the protocol will be available to task forces in regions and communities throughout the state. Local jurisdictions will be able to create versions of the protocol to best meet their needs.

#### What is a Protocol?

A protocol is a coordinated agreement between agencies about their roles and responsibilities regarding a specific issue, in this case working with prostituted youth.

#### Why is a protocol important when discussing prostituted youth?

Because it's time that prostituted children are treated as victims, not criminals.



## THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH JUSTICE (CCYJ)

### One-of-a-kind in the State of Washington

Recognizing the missed opportunities to create better solutions for kids in the foster care and youth justice systems, retired Washington State Supreme Court Justice Bobbe Bridge founded **the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ)** in 2006. To date, there is no other organization in Washington State with the singular goal of reforming policies concerning foster care and youth justice. More importantly, our work is creating positive and lasting change for kids in areas like child abuse, truancy and the over-representation of minority youth in the justice system.

## PROJECT RESPECT

### Improving Youth Lives; Improving Local Communities.

Ultimately, Project Respect will decrease arrests for teen prostitution, reduce the number of youth who return to prostitution, and increase the prosecution of traffickers. It will not only improve the lives of victimized children and youth throughout Washington State, it can become a national model for easing the further traumatization of these young girls and boys. donors. Please contact us for further information.

**For more information about Project Respect or CCYJ please contact:**

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