

PRESENTING TO: the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

THEIR ROLE: Oversee combatting human trafficking and authorizing sting operations overseas.

MEGAN'S LAW: (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/515>)
The law would set up a notification system with destination countries about suspected child-sex trafficking in an effort to combat human trafficking

Good afternoon Chairman Smith and esteemed members of Congress.

My name is Timothy Ballard. I am the founder and CEO of the non-profit organization, Operation Underground Railroad (O.U.R.).

I served 12 years as a U.S. Special Agent for the Department of Homeland Security. As a member of the Internet Crimes against Children Task Force and the Homeland Security Investigations Child Sex Tourism Jump Team, I helped infiltrate and dismantle dozens of trafficking organizations that kidnapped children and/or abused them or forced them into the commercial sex trade. In 2006, with the passage of the Adam Walsh Child Protect Act, Congress opened the doors for U.S. agents to better investigate cases dealing with U.S. travelers who would enter foreign countries in order to sexually abuse children. I was one of the first agents assigned to engage these international investigations as an undercover operative posing as a child sex tourist or as a travel agent who specialized in child sex tours.

I was proud to represent the United States in dealing with this horrific issue. However, I often felt helpless by the fact that the vast majority of child sex victims fell outside the purview of developed nations, which meant that they were lost and unlikely to ever be rescued. As a U.S. agent, I would not be authorized to rescue children if their cases lacked a U.S. nexus or couldn't be tried in a U.S. court. Unless I could tie a U.S. traveler to an investigation, and though I could easily identify foreign children being sold in the commercial sex trade abroad, I was generally not allowed to engage or not provided the resources to engage.

As an agent, I once had the opportunity to work on a specific case in Colombia. I did my due diligence and knew where the children were, but was told that I could not engage because it wasn't going to end in a U.S. Courtroom. Time after time- constantly being told, "No", the frustration slowly grew.

I wanted to attack this problem from a different angle, so I left the U.S. government and created Operation Underground Railroad last year.

We since went back to Colombia as a private organization and pulled off one of the largest child trafficking rescues ever. By setting up a sting operation that consisted of the ruse of "child sex parties," we were able to help the Colombians rescue more than 120 victims in one day.

What's most interesting about this specific Colombia case is that Homeland Security agents ended up arresting American Citizen, Dennis DeJesus. DeJesus caught wind of our fake sex party in Colombia and was heading down from Florida when the U.S. agents arrested him. (<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fl-sex-tourism-arrest-20141015-story.html>). In the end, we got our American. Evidence concluded that DeJesus had produced child pornography and had traveled previously to Colombia in order to engage in sex with minors. DeJesus pled guilty to child sex crimes just a few weeks ago. This case proved that when engaging the problems of international child sex crimes, there is a good chance that a nexus to the United States will eventually be made. However, I never would have been able to initiate this investigation as a U.S. agent due to the fact that that U.S. nexus did not appear until the end of the investigation. I also learned that once my team initiated this investigation, along with Colombian authorities, the U.S. embassy and the Homeland Security Investigations Bogota Office, was more than happy to support the case. However, without our private efforts, the resources or mandate to pull it off did not exist with any United States asset. This is a matter of frustration to many United States agents. They want to do more. They need more resources to do more.

The current approach by the United States government to international child sex crimes could use some adjusting. More mechanisms need to be out into place so that the United States can better engage this problem. Oftentimes it feels like our policies and practices—though not our people or government agents—take a position that a foreign problem is simply not a U.S. problem. However, as the DeJesus case proves, when it comes to child sex crimes, this problem is international. And the fact that we are talking about child victims should cause us on a moral level to find ways to remove barriers that prevent international engagement. I have worked with many foreign governments, and I have never seen one that does not desire more U.S. involvement when it comes to these specific crimes against the most vulnerable souls on earth.

By advancing this bill, it is another opportunity to attack this problem from a different angle. It will help bridge the gap. As a government agent, it was always frustrating to know that, minus a crystal ball, it would always be a serious challenge to predict when a child sex traveler would cross our borders to engage in illicit sex with children. As quoted in H.R. 515, legitimate studies have concluded that there are close to 2 million children in the world currently in the commercial sex trade. This bill also points out that a significant percentage of child sex tourists are from the United States. I know these stats are true, as I have worked for over a decade inside these black markets. In a sad commentary on our society, the reason our cover story has worked so well and has been easily bought by perpetrators is due to the fact that we are Americans. They are used to catering to Americans. They are used to selling children to Americans. This is an American problem, no matter where on the earth the child victim happens to be.

In this country we proudly work under Megan's Law, as a means to encourage states to protect children by identifying and monitoring the whereabouts of child sex offenders. As a society we have accepted the fact that convicted child sex offenders pose a greater risk to children than others in society. And so we make their presence known. Why would we not offer this same mechanism to our friends overseas? We might picture a man who has

been convicted of raping children in a foreign country. We might imagine that this man is coming for a visit to our towns, parks, and neighborhoods where our children play. Would we not want to know about this man's past? Of course we would. I assure you our friends in other countries want this information as well, especially the would-be child victims of the crimes.

Advancing this bill is an opportunity to connect law enforcement agencies around the world by arming them with actionable intelligence they can use to prevent child sex crimes from occurring. The Angel Watch Center will also be a significant first step in bridging the gap between governments and NGOs like ours that have real experience in rescuing and rehabilitating victims of trafficking. One of the great benefits of being an NGO, is that it allows greater freedom for anti-child crimes experts to move about the world, plugging quickly into any government jurisdiction, and rapidly bringing the tools to fight child crimes into the hands of government officials who need them. We are readily afforded access to information regarding child sex rings that is useful to combat them. One of the challenges for us, of course, is establishing and maintaining direct relationships with government officials who need and want our services. Through the Angel Watch Center, this problem will be helped. The Center will serve as a venue where a public-private partnership can more easily leverage all the intelligence, ideas, tools, and strategies to best protect children at home and abroad.

Speaking for my organization, we have physically rescued hundreds of victims in the last year alone. Advancing this bill and creating the Angel Watch Center, I believe could double or triple that number for us. And that's just us. Add to that the many other NGOs and government agencies, foreign and domestic, that will participate in the Angel Watch Center, and we will be saving more children than ever before. Let's not wait any longer to put this bill into law. The children are desperately waiting for us. I know. I have seen them.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. There is no greater cause on earth today that deserves our united attention. With that, I am happy to answer any questions you might have for me.