

Testimony of
Robert J. Benz, Co-Founder, Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives
Before the
Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee
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Winning the Fight Against Human Trafficking: The Frederick Douglass Reauthorization Act

Chairman, Smith, Ranking Member Bass and Subcommittee members,

Thank you for inviting me today. My name is Robert Benz. I am Co-Founder of Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives. I'm happy to be here to discuss the recently introduced, Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act.

Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives, or FDFI, is an Atlanta-based public charity that was founded by Nettie Washington Douglass, Kenneth B. Morris, Jr. and myself. Ms. Douglass has an incredible lineage. She is the great-great granddaughter of Frederick Douglass and the great-granddaughter of Booker T. Washington. Her eldest son, Mr. Morris, is, of course, one generation removed from these two influential Americans.

Since 2007, FDFI has built upon those legacies in developing methods for addressing contemporary slavery through prevention education, professional training and grassroots community collaboration. Our organization is guided by a philosophy that is articulated in two famous quotes by Frederick Douglass: That "Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave" and that "It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." We believe the Frederick Douglass Act is a critical step to integrating these two ideas into anti-trafficking efforts, both domestically and abroad. The addition of the word "Prevention" to the title of the bill gives us hope that more attention and more resources will be focused on what happens to a person, especially a child, before they become a victim of human trafficking.

In order to begin reducing the numbers of new victims being exposed to the unforgiving cycle of exploitation, we must consider investing in primary prevention and early intervention strategies. To be clear, when we speak of primary prevention, we are referring to the application of knowledge in the form of education, training and/or awareness initiatives for general populations. The cost benefits to taxpayers, for preventing or mitigating human trafficking at an early stage, are enormous. The human benefit for preventing someone from being victimized is incalculable.

We are encouraged by the bill's recommendation to amend language in the ESEA that will incentivize educating children on the signs and dangers of human trafficking. FDFI has firsthand experience doing this in primary and secondary schools while collaborating with educators, law enforcement, service agencies and NGOs. Through our curriculum, we help young people make

the connection between historical and modern slavery then ask them to take what they've learned and do something to address the problem.

One example is Jamelia Watson who, last year, participated in an FDFI curricular project at her Cincinnati high school and, this year, started an anti-trafficking organization at Vassar College called, *The Underground*.

Our social studies class learned about human trafficking during my senior year of high school when my teacher used the Globalize 13 curriculum developed by FDFI. I've taken that knowledge, and the privilege I have in attending college, and started an organization on my campus to educate others about this horrible crime.

Jamelia Watson

FDFI has done work in school districts across the country: from a partnership with Mayor Bloomberg's office for New York City Public Schools and Chicago Public Schools with the support of Mayor Daley to small rural districts in Nebraska and Idaho. FDFI partners internationally as well with the Frederick Douglass Ireland Project to educate young people in Ireland about Douglass's time there.

FDFI also develops training programs for educators, youth supervisors and community professionals helping to build stronger and safer social structures around children. We're particularly proud of a prevention education and training program, started in 2016, called PROTECT – an acronym meaning Prevention Organized to Educate Children on Trafficking. It will be implemented in 35 of 58 California counties by 2019. Our partners include; 3 Strands Global, Love Never Fails, Polaris Project and the California Department of Education. Together we're creating a model that can be replicated elsewhere in the world that is holistic, cost efficient and an effective way to keep children from being trafficked in communities from California to Khartoum. I've provide more details on PROTECT for the written record.

PROTECT is deployed in four parts: 1) Protocol – In order to make sure that county agencies and other partners are coordinated in their efforts to address human trafficking, there must be agreement as to what happens if and when a child is identified as a potential victim of human trafficking and who does what, 2) Training – We train county personnel, who might be involved with those victims or potential victims, as well as administrators, school staff and teachers. Training involves understanding the issue of human trafficking, causation, the kinds of trafficking in that particular area, the historical connection to slavery, red flags, the protocol and, for specific teachers, how to deliver the curriculum in the classroom, 3) Curriculum – We provide age-appropriate content within our curricula that meets state learning standards for grade 5, 7, 9 and 11. We also ask 11th graders to develop a service project in their community to apply the knowledge they've gained on the subject, and 4) Research – All of the training and curriculum are accompanied by pre- and post-surveys that help us better understand how students and adults are receiving and reacting to the program and how the materials can be improved. We want to understand how education and training can reduce the incidence of

trafficking. All of this is done with the help of technology as scalability is essential to reach larger numbers of people. Students that are experiencing personal issues related to abuse or exploitation are encouraged to disclose this to an adult, but they are also given the option of reaching out anonymously to the National Human Trafficking Hotline which is supplemented by our local partner, TipNow. The program is being funded, in large part, by the Rural Counties Representatives of California and has been supported since day one by the Office of the Attorney General of the State of California and California State University, Sacramento.

The United States took a leadership role in anti-trafficking with the first Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. We now have an opportunity to become the leader for innovative primary prevention strategies that we believe will incrementally reduce the numbers of young victims and allow us to envision eradicating contemporary slavery in the US and around the world.

We also hope that the endorsement of prevention within the Frederick Douglass Act will translate meaningfully into the design of the next Strategic Action Plan on Human Trafficking. FDFI is enthusiastic about supporting and participating in these efforts.

In the meantime, on behalf of the Frederick Douglass family, we look forward to collaborating with federal legislators, agencies and non-profit organizations in our mutual struggle to end contemporary slavery.