

Testimony of Bob Rodgers
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before
Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process
of the
House Committee on Rules

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Chairman Hastings and Honorable Members of the House Rules Committee, good morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today to address the issue of sex trafficking. I know we can all agree it is a shame we have to have organizations like Street Grace and that conversations like this are even necessary. However, for Street Grace and many others in the fight, we have never been more encouraged. Together, we are making meaningful and measurable progress.

I am grateful for the committee's willingness to deal with this issue directly and at the highest levels to keep it in the forefront. This is how real progress is made. I have never met anyone in favor of sex trafficking yet, every day, I meet folks who do not know what it is and that it is happening in their state and in their communities.

I have the distinct honor of serving as the president & CEO of Street Grace. Launched in 2008, Street Grace was formed as a collaborative response to the growing issue of Child Sex Trafficking in Atlanta and throughout the state of Georgia. Today we have offices in 4 states and additionally have partnered with more than 10 state Attorney General offices around the country.

Since context matters, it is important that you know the lens that we see this issue through. We are:

- 1) Christ centered
- 2) Child focused
- 3) Demand centric

All of our initiatives rest on one of 3 pillars:

- 1) **Prevention | protection of children** - we are presenting our information to more than 50,000 kids between the ages of 12-18 each year.
- 2) **Policy** – Street Grace is a leader in local and national policy recommendation that provides a better framework for law enforcement to make more arrests that can be successfully prosecuted. Also, creating access to care for those who have been

victimized by this crime while ensuring the perpetrators – the traffickers and the buyers of sex (who are also traffickers) face appropriate convictions and sentencing.

- 3) Pursuit** – through the use of learning Artificial Intelligence and Chatbots even as we sit here in this hearing today we have technology deployed in @15 cites in 8 states identifying bad actors who are attempting to purchase sex with children. Let's be clear, I don't mean in any way to be offensive or disrespectful but I think it is important that we call it out for what it is. It is the exchange of something of value to rape a child, repeatedly. It must be stopped; no child deserves this.

I mentioned this was an encouraging time to be in the fight against sex trafficking. I would briefly like to highlight a couple of those reasons and I am happy to comment further, if needed, in the Q&A or after the hearing:

- 1) On this issue, there is a greater level of collaboration and cooperation occurring between government, NGO's, law enforcement, corporations, the Academy, faith communities, community groups and more. Many states are benefitting from this more now, than at any point in the past. We just saw a very practical example of this earlier this year in Atlanta as we came together to create a web of protection around our city as we hosted the Super Bowl. While it was not perfect, it worked.
- 2) We are acknowledging that restorative care for those who have been victimized by this is critical. They need, and deserve, the best gold standard of medical care, mental health and skills support, and other resources. BUT,
- 3) We will never end the issue by following it around and helping those impacted work to put the pieces back together. They deserve more and we can do better. We must look at this as the illegal business that it is and we strategically work to dismantle it.
- 4) We will never end sex trafficking one arrest, one rescue and one prosecution at a time - we must scale up. The use of AI, Chatbot and other technology allows us to keep pace with the traffickers and the tools they use
- 5) There is a growing acceptance towards removing the cloak of anonymity for the buyers of illegal sex – laws are being passed that allows for the arrest and exposure of those who are caught.

These are meaningful reasons we have cause for encouragement. And, there is more to do to continue to make measurable progress.

- 1) Allocate additional funding for prevention and evidenced based demand reduction strategies. Historically, overwhelmingly, the funding has gone towards restorative care.

- 2) Because this is such a hidden crime that requires proactive investigations, prioritize trafficking investigations among the federal law enforcement agencies like the FBI, HSI, and others. We must include the rampant transnational / organized crime rings in the illicit massage industry). No one is better positioned than the fed govt to address these large transnational and organized criminal enterprises.
- 3) Look at systemic approaches that can be used to cripple segments of the industry. The Illicit Cash Act that is being considered now could, quite possibly, help us dismantle the Illicit Massage Industry in the US in the next 24 months. You have the power to do, with the stroke of a pen, what could take a decade to do without your support and leadership.
- 4) Continuing to create and pass legislation that allows those who have been victimized by this to have civil recourse, including expungement and vacatur laws, and recourse against all who knowingly benefitted from this by actively or passively allowing this to occur.
- 5) Continue to focus on restorative care solutions as well as evidence-based demand reduction strategies – we can do both.

Simply put, much good is occurring while much is left to do. But the pace of progress is accelerating and it seems like a tipping point could be in sight.