

Thank you Madam Chair and Members of the Committee: For the record I am Staci Yates the Director of Human Trafficking Recovery Services with My House, Chair of ASTHA (Alaska Stop Human Trafficking Alliance), and a member of the Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking. Today, I come before you as a survivor of Sexual Exploitation at the age of 17 in Charlotte, NC.

First I would like to preface my testimony with, I would like for you to understand just how grooming works and how easy it is for vulnerable youth to fall prey. This is a terrifying statement, but your kids don't have to leave home to be trafficked today. With unlimited access to the internet, porn, gaming sites with chat rooms and sex rooms. Don't get me started on social media sites of Snapchat, Instagram, FB, Tiktok: I have six kids and all of kids have been approached multiple times by predators on all of those sites. My 10-year-old has been approached by predators on Roblox and I was warned recently by a law enforcement friend to get him of Gorilla Tag, where recently a 10-year-old was sexually exploited on that game! There are thousands of predators online and they are looking for vulnerable kids, who spend lots of unsupervised time online and they know how to make friends with our kids and fill a need they have.

1 out of 9 children are
sexually solicited
online



1 out of 3 girls and 1
out of 5 boys are
sexually abused



2 million children are
sold into sex trafficking
every year



92% of trafficking victims were abused in childhood. In Alaska I believe that is higher, according to the 2019 FBI Uniform Crime Report Alaska's rate of sexual assault is nearly 4 times the national average and our child sexual assaults are nearly 6 times the national average!!! We are number one in our State, but for the wrong reasons.

We need your help to fix this

My story is not an easy one, it is filled with tragic and horrific circumstances that I believe I survived for a reason. This is the second time I have told my story in a public setting, first time was on my podcast Redemption, Loved and Thriving.

My story begins at an early age. At the age of 6 I witnessed horrific domestic violence and my dad's many attempts at killing my mother before me. I was the care taker, stepping in front of firearms to shield my mother from harm, begging to be the one to take the bullet. I would wipe the blood from her face and torn body, bringing her ice packs for the swellings and many times comforting her until she fell asleep.

At the age of 9 I became addicted to porn from my parent's magazines laying around the house. I was confused at the feelings it produced in me at such young age. It's been proven that kids exposed to porn at early ages are more prone to sexual abuse as they grow up. Boys who are exposed to porn at early ages are more prone to be a reckless buyer of sex when they grow up, as the sexualization of women is already normalized in their little brains.

Age 11 I was sexually abused by a cousin. At age 12 I entered foster care system due to the horrific domestic violence in my home, being moved to a completely different state to live with an aunt who was a Foster Care Parent in the State of Virginia. By the age 13 I was date raped by an 18-year-old. At this point in my life my ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) was a 9 out of a score from 1-10 (you don't want to be a 10) At that point in my life I began drinking, and using marijuana to dull the pain.

It is known that foster care, homeless kids and those with higher ACES scores are more prone to fall victims to sex trafficking, because sexual abuse has already been in their lives.

At the age of 17 I found myself homeless in Charlotte, NC where I couch surfed for many months. That's when I came across a friend from Virginia's sister who was 30 years old living in Charlotte and she offered me to live with her and her boyfriend. (remember what grooming is: she is meeting a need, a roof over my head and food into my belly) She became my friend and showed me love and acceptance.

She then offered me to work with her and her boss at a "photography place". This is where I met him. They started me on cocaine pretty quickly and I got addicted and did it every day for over a year. (I was probably 90 pounds dripping wet and I lived off macaroni and cheese boxes for that year) I accompanied them as they delivered photography jobs to customers as a front for delivering cocaine to customers. I attended underground gambling establishments with men at the doors holding huge automatic rifles and looked quite scary.

After a while, it was implied that I needed to pay back my debt of cocaine use, which was huge by that time. (Remember I was living for free, eating their food, using their cocaine)

So I had to start attending parties where orgies would occur, I was told which men to engage with and then I was encouraged to service clients as pay back, all the while they are continuously feeding me cocaine. I later learned that I was being groomed to be sold to the highest bidder, an executive in Charlotte. By this time, I was 19 years old. I hated doing what I had to do to survive. I didn't want to be homeless again and I had a trauma bond with these people. I just could never see the end of paying back the huge debt I owed because it kept growing.

So you may wonder how did I escape Trafficking?

One night they brought a party over to my apartment, several prominent players attended, one was a doctor, and they cooked something over a stove and then shot it into my arm. That's the last thing I remember. I woke up in the dark, alone, naked, bruised and in a bathtub of ice up to my neck. It took a while for me to be able to flop out of the tub and just lay there trying to breathe and thaw out. I guess either I overdosed and they were trying to keep me alive by slowing down my heart rate or he was doctor, was it an organ they were after?

As I laid there in the dark, thawing, it just hit me hard, that they were really my friends, they didn't have my back, they were just using me. They actually left me there to die alone, no ambulance called, I guess I can be thankful they put me in ice, that I lived. It took me a few days to feel better, but then I packed up all my stuff and left the state without a word, never looking back. You just don't tell the Charlotte Mafia your leaving town.

I am the lucky one, I survived my trafficking story. It's well known that trafficking victims usually don't live in the life past 7 years. I believe I survived to tell you my story. I want to help youth that have fallen into that trap escape, heal and go on with their lives, but I need your help. HB 68 and SB 66 will give us tools to help victims get their lives back.

And I would like to go on the record stating I am 100% against legalizing prostitution in the State of Alaska. Don't believe what they are telling you. It's been proven that countries that legalized prostitution now have higher rates of human trafficking. According to Harvard Law and International Development Society in their 2014 article "Does Legalized Prostitution Increase Human Trafficking?" I quote: "Countries with legalized prostitution are associated with higher human trafficking inflows than countries where prostitution is prohibited. The scale effect of legalizing prostitution expansion of the market, outweighs the substitution

effect, where legal sex workers are favored over illegal workers. On average, countries with legalized prostitution report greater incidence of human trafficking inflows.”

No-where in history has a kindergartener ever raised their hands in class and when asked what they want be when they grow up, they say “I want to be sex worker” I believe most of participants in prostitution were sexually abused as children, remember the statistic I told you that 92% of trafficking victims were abused in childhood, normalizing the fact that their bodies were just meant to be used for sex. **Prostitution is not a victimless crime.** I say it again for those in the back, **Prostitution is not a victimless crime.** That’s why HB 68 and SB 66 is so important: Holding the John’s, the buyers of sex accountable when they recklessly buy sex from a child or a trafficked individual. When I was 17 and they asked me my age I would say 21, as I was too scared to say my real age.

As I close, I want to thank Madam Chair for giving me this huge opportunity to speak before the House of Judiciary and as I know Senate Members may be listening to my testimony today, I implore you to please let this bill and Survivors of Trafficking be heard as well in your Senate Judiciary Committee where it’s still sitting. Please do not table this bill again this year because of politics. This bill will benefit the victims of the most hideous crimes against a person, or a child, which is the raping of a person for monetary value. I stand before you as a survivor. Please help me to help those who have fallen into the dark trap I did! It’s a slap in the face to survivors all over Alaska when a committee won’t even let this bill be heard. Thank you so much Madam Chair and Members of this Committee for hearing my testimony. It’s been an honor to share with you my journey.

Thoughts I leave with you: The only way we are going to win this war that is on our children is to teach them the signs of grooming. They not only will save themselves, but they will save others. Let’s empower every Alaskan youth with knowledge and tools to escape the snares of sexual abuse and trafficking. My passion is to get SPEAK UP Curriculum in every hand of every Alaskan. It’s time to fight back! We can save our kids!

Together We Can Make a Difference!