



**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 61
Presented to the House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee**

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Chairman Rubin and Members of the Committee,

After 46 years of abolitionary work spearheaded by William Wilberforce, Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act in August of 1833. Wilberforce's efforts are said to have paved the way for the "abolition of slavery in every colony in the Empire." And yet, to this very day, we find that "this odious traffic in human flesh" continues in modern form on our own soil in the United States and yes, even in Kansas. It is for this reason that I, Dr. Karen Countryman-Roswurm, stand in front of you today in support of Senate Bill 61.

I support Senate Bill 61 as the Founding Director of the Wichita State University Center for Combating Human Trafficking and as the Founder of the Anti-Sexual Exploitation Roundtable for Community Action (ASERCA), but even more, I do so from the multiple perspectives in which I have experienced the issue of human trafficking first hand over the last 19 years: first, as a young person who, after the suicide of my mother when I was thirteen years of age, was thrown into a treacherous street life and a demoralizing system of care; second, as a professional who has directly served runaway, homeless, and street youth (RHSY) who are at-risk of, or subjugated to, domestic sex trafficking (DST) as an outreach worker, mental health therapist, and advocate; and third, as an expert who has researched the issue of human trafficking through the Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents (MLSHA) and through the development of my original instrument, the Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Risk and Resiliency Assessment (DMST-RRA).

It was in the spring of 2000 when my heart ultimately became committed to making the anti-human trafficking fight my life's work. On a typical afternoon of locating youth participants of the MLSHA Project, and picking them up for interviews, I arrived at a run-down apartment complex right off the main drag of north Broadway – an area of Wichita, Kansas known for homelessness, drug exchange, and sexually exploitive activity. I had gone there to pick up a young African American female who, at five months pregnant, had regularly received services through the Wichita Children's Home, Street Outreach Program and had actively participated in the MLSHA since the start of the Project. As I sat in my car parked to the north of the complex, I watch the young woman walk towards my car; I then noticed that she stopped and began to argue with her "boyfriend" who – though I did not understand the full nature and extent of DMST at the time – I knew was acting as some form of pimp to her.

Time seemed to slow and yet rapidly consume me as I sat in my car watching the interaction escalate. I felt I was in quicksand and I knew I needed to do something quick. I reached into my back seat to grab my cell phone out of my purse, but before I could dial the number the young woman had opened my car door. In an attempt to escape from the hands of her large-statured “boyfriend” her thin white undershirt had been halfway ripped from her body revealing her protruding five months of maternity. She paused for a moment with my car door open – looking back towards the man who served as her attacker before sitting down into the front car seat – giving him just enough time to catch up to her and virtually rip off my car door in one full sweep. Before I knew it, the man was on top of her and I in the front seat of my small vehicle – hitting, scratching, biting, spitting on, and cursing at both of us. Time stood still and observers watched saying nothing.

After what seemed like an eternity, an offbeat officer arrived. Fatefully, he had driven past the scene on his way home and had decided to stop based on the large crowd gathering to watch the incident. After struggling with our attacker and cuffing him in the back seat of the Wichita Police Department vehicle, the kind officer discussed the situation with the young woman and I. He explained that due to lack of legislation, if the young woman did not testify, her perpetrator would be released from jail within 24 hours. The officer also shared that even though she was under the age of 18 years, the abuse by the hands of her “boyfriend” would not fall under domestic violence law because of acknowledgement that she was involved in “prostitution.” In response to such information, the young woman shared with me that she would not testify. She shared her love, commitment, and loyalty to her “boyfriend” and even more so, she shared that with me that “this is the most control I’ve ever had in terms of who I have sex with.” She went on to tell me, “You see Karen – my dad had sex with me, my dad let my brothers have sex with me, and my dad let my uncles and his friends have sex with so he could get his drugs and alcohol.”

It was in this moment that I began to understand the full and complex face of domestic sex trafficking. Specifically, it was in this moment that I began to comprehend, at a deeper level, how past trauma acts as the grounds of vulnerability for trafficking predators to prey. After all, the young woman had been commodified from the day she was born, and her perpetrator knew very well that what can be stolen, can be easily sold. She had been incubated in trauma, and her trauma continued in her subjugation to domestic sex trafficking.

I can present you with literature and statistical research, but you have heard that here today. From this story, my hope is that you recognize the complex nature of domestic sex trafficking. And with this, I hope you also recognize the need to develop holistic and multi-disciplinary systems that address the complexity of preventing and intervening in cases of human trafficking. As I stated in testimonial support of Senate Bill 353, in 2010, “combating all forms of human trafficking, whether labor or sexual exploitation, takes a collaborative multi-disciplinary approach that bridges the gap between direct practice, research, and policy. This includes providing public awareness and professional training, prevention services, early identification and intervention services, survivor protection and human rights advocacy, perpetrator prosecution, and recovery services, while at the same time working to reduce the demand that encourages trafficking to occur in the first place” (Countryman-Roswurm, 2010).

Though we still have a long way to go in addressing the issue of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in the State of Kansas, SB 61 is a comprehensive bill that seeks to support systemic, as well as multi-disciplinary efforts in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. It responds to the recommendations of the aforementioned testimony in the following ways:

1. The foundation of human trafficking efforts begins with identifying sex trafficking as a human

rights/social justice issue. After all, language shapes paradigms and paradigms influence the diverse and complex practices of service providers who might have the opportunity to identify and/or intervene in the life of a survivor of human trafficking. Dealing with this issue, and creating a paradigm shift in this arena, has consumed much of my efforts over the last decade. And yet still, it is not uncommon for first responders or service providers to treat sex trafficking survivors as delinquent criminals rather than survivors of a form of victimization that requires holistic trauma responsive care. Senate Bill 61 provides a formalized method of addressing this issue by removing the terminology of “prostitute” and “prostitution.”

2. In effort to attack the demand which fuels the continued growth of human trafficking rates, SB 61 increases the fines and penalties of all perpetrators involved. Jail time is increased and those convicted of commercial sexual exploitation of a child are required to register under the Kansas Sex Offender Registration Act.
3. Human trafficking survivors require long-term victim/survivor-centered, trauma-informed, holistic care provided by multi-disciplinary professionals. A sample of such holistic prevention and intervention services include, but are not limited to, a.) data management and research; b.) early identification and assessment; c.) immediate shelter/housing; d.) physical health examinations and treatment; e.) mental and emotional health treatment; and f.) legal support/representation. Such interventions should be aimed at assisting the survivor toward recovery and empowering autonomous transitions into their community. Furthermore, recognizing that treatment should be victim/survivor-centered, we must ensure “room” for survivors to truly guide and direct their process from victim, to survivor, to acting leaders in this fight against human trafficking. SB 61 addresses the need to support services to survivors through the establishment of the Human Trafficking Victim’s Assistance Fund (HTVAF).

Moving forward, and building upon the great progress this legislation creates, it is my recommendation that:

1. we seek to institutionalize and utilize language that truly a.) clearly articulates the issue of domestic sex trafficking as a form of abuse, b.) commits to a paradigm that all sex trafficking survivors deserve holistic/multi-disciplinary services rather than jail sentences, c.) more accurately represents the scope and reality of human trafficking, and d.) provides a common language that serves as a foundation for facilitating a comprehensive community response (Lloyd & Orman, 2007).
2. state-level funding is made available, as well as accessible, to the multi-disciplinary professionals in the field who provide awareness and training, assessment and identification, research and data management, and housing and treatment services.
3. human trafficking training, assessment, and services, as well as the funding streams that support such efforts, remain as neutral as possible through the guidance and direction of a multi-disciplinary board such as the Attorney General Schmidt Human Trafficking Advisory Board (HTAB).

During a speech to Parliament regarding the abolishment of slavery, William Wilberforce (1787), stated, “having heard all of this you may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say that you did not know.” We have, represented here today, a great collaboration of hard-working multi-disciplinary professionals and I do know, that we will not turn our heads. I believe, your decision today, as well as future efforts, will ensure justice for our neighbors and friends, our nieces and nephews, and our children and grandchildren who have been or who are currently being mentally, emotionally, physically, and sexually brutalized through the subjugation of human trafficking.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of Senate Bill 61.