



WOMEN'S
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NETWORK

**United States House of Representatives Judiciary Subcommittee on
Crime Terrorism, and Homeland Security Hearing Regarding
“Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”**

September 15, 2010

**Testimony Provided by Deborah Richardson
Chief Program Officer
Women's Funding Network**



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Good afternoon.

I would like to thank Chairman Conyers for inviting me to be here today and Committee Chairman Scott, Committee Ranking Member Representative Gohmer and all members of the committee for providing this opportunity to call attention to a national tragedy that has gone largely ignored for far too long. I'd also like to thank Representatives Maloney, Smith, Poe and Speier for their leadership on this issue.

It is an honor to be a part this momentous hearing and a voice in this timely federal discussion surrounding domestic minor sex trafficking.

I have been working to protect girls from domestic sex trafficking for more than a decade. I have seen girls as young as 10, handcuffed, literally hauled off to juvenile detention – and charged as offenders, while the men who paid for sex with these young victims went free.

Every day action is delayed girls across our country – our daughters, our future – are being forced into a life unimaginable.

As passion emanates from our hearts and souls – independent research supports our cry for action.

Since February 2010, an independent research firm has conducted quarterly counts of adolescent girls who were being advertised for commercial sex. Our numbers for the month of August are just in. Michigan, New York and Minnesota show an exponential rise in online domestic sex trafficking from February to August of this year:

Michigan, a 39.2% increase; New York a 20.7% increase and Minnesota a staggering 64.7% increase.

The Internet is consistently the predominate source of traffickers to advertise girls and for predators to purchase young girls. The anonymity and low risk the internet provides make this heinous crime practically risk free.

On paper, online trafficking appears as a series of numbers without a face or a voice. But numbers alone cannot convey the despicable nature of this crime. To demonstrate my point, allow me to play for you segments of actual voice recordings from men who were answering an online ad to purchase young girls.

[Audio Recordings](#)

These voices are shocking and what you have heard is only a few out of the 264 voice recordings over six days in states that permit an individual to record a call. And every day there are media [reports](#) across the nation detailing cases of underage girls who have been trafficked.

You may be familiar with the independent study, "[Men Who Buy Sex with Adolescent Girls](#)," commissioned by Georgia's "[A Future. Not A Past.](#)" It is the first-of-its-kind to quantify, describe, and understand demand for paid sex with underage girls.

It clearly identifies the Internet as the primary platform for domestic minor sex trafficking, painting a lucid picture of the adult men who buy sex with underage girls.

- The numbers were staggering — 12,400 men each month in Georgia pay for sex with a young female. These men account for 8,700 paid sex acts with adolescent females each month, which means that each adolescent female is **forced into paid sex an average of 3 times per day**.
- Those men who responded to ads for sex with young females represent 67% of the larger population of men who pay for sex overall.
- Craigslist was by far the most efficient medium for advertising sex with young females; ads on this site received 3 times as many responses compared to identical ads placed on other sites.
- After three warnings that the girl was an adolescent, 65% of men who were bold enough to ignore the second warning with regard to the age of the girl, were also bold enough to ignore the third warning and continue with the transaction.

Objective review suggests that running these advertisements on Internet classifieds can be highly profitable.

[The AIM Group](#), which has tracked craigslist's revenue since 2003 reported the company's projected 'Adult Services' revenues, prior to removing the section, were \$44 million annually across all of its U.S. markets.

Backpage, another Internet classifieds site, generates approximately \$17.5 million per year, according to the study. These profits – even in part – should not be generated by the trafficking of young girls.

Laws protecting young girls have not kept up with technology. And there seems to be little political and public will to protect young girls from online domestic trafficking within the United States.

This needs to change.

Women’s Funding Network has accelerated our efforts to end domestic sex trafficking of our girls by an initial investment of \$1 million through our women’s funds. Through this investment, we are launching the replication of “*A Future. Not A Past.*,” a model with successful results in Georgia. This model is currently being launched into four states— Michigan, Minnesota, New York and Texas. We plan to leverage an additional \$2 million to continue this replication in partnership with our members in six additional states.

As important, we will use the collective voices of our 151 members in 42 states representing a constituency of hundreds of thousands of women and men to stand side-by-side with Congress, law enforcement and fellow advocacy organizations to end the domestic sex trafficking of underage girls.

We believe the strategies to end domestic sex trafficking are clear:

- Decriminalize girls who are trafficked, provide them with care and protection as victims and provide services for their rescue and restoration.
- Provide resources to law enforcement to increase arrests, prosecuting both the traffickers and especially the predators.
- Legislative response to claims by websites that their conduct is immune from local and state law enforcement.
- Oversight role of other federal branches of government responding to these issues.
- Together as a nation, that values human rights, we must come together and create a no tolerance for buying and selling our children for sex.

Like all complex social justice issues, the road to combating domestic minor sex trafficking is long. But a first step at the federal level to protect our girls from being trafficked is to pass [H.R. 5575, the “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Deterrence and Victims Support Act of 2010,”](#) introduced on June 23 by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ) to provide critical funding for collaborative pilot programs in regions across the country to combat domestic minor sex trafficking.

Our girls are waiting for us, and we are honor bound to act.