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Eliminating Modern Day Slavery

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As a Texas State Senator and a United States Congressman from Texas, we are joined by our mutual concern for human trafficking victims and the devastating impact that human trafficking has on the great State of Texas that we both proudly call home. As public servants, we recognize the deficiency in attention and resources dedicated to trafficked victims at both levels of government. All too often, human trafficking victims – like victims of other crimes – are overlooked. When in need of support and resources, our governments are often underprepared and overburdened. As Texans, we are deeply concerned that our home state is a hub for human trafficking. Unless we continue to educate Texas policy makers, researchers, educators, law enforcement officials, health care professionals, and residents about the prevalence of human trafficking, we will not gain the support needed to fight this increasingly prevalent crime.

I, Congressman Ted Poe, have dedicated my life to promoting justice. As the co-founder and co-chair of the Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus (VRC), I serve as the leading advocate for victims in the United States Congress. I founded the VRC in 2006 to help elevate victims' issues in our nation's Capital and to serve as a voice and advocate for victims in Congress and before the administration. In the 111th Congress, I sponsored or co-sponsored over 30 pieces of legislation that provide awareness and resources for crime victims. One of the greatest legislative achievements was the U.S. House of Representatives' passage of the International Megan's Law of 2010, a bill that seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation by preventing or monitoring the international travel of sex traffickers and other sex offenders who pose a risk of committing a sex offense against a minor while traveling.

As a Texas State Senator, I, Leticia Van de Putte, have been and will continue to be at the forefront of Texas' effort to end human trafficking. I first learned of human trafficking when I heard the story of "David," a 16-year-old runaway who was forced into prostitution in order to protect his 14-year-old sister from being harmed. "David" was arrested for prostitution and drug possession, but due to severe health problems, he was sent to a San Antonio hospital. The physician who treated "David" diagnosed old injuries from chronic abuse that could not have been willingly endured. Not certain where to turn for help the doctor called me. After learning about "David," I was horrified to discover there are thousands of victims trafficked in and through Texas each year, far too many of whom are children just like "David." In 2009, I passed legislation which created a statewide human trafficking prevention task force. The task force is composed of law enforcement officials, social service providers, federal, state, and local officials, non-governmental organizations, district

attorneys, and advocacy groups such as CHILDREN AT RISK. Since its creation the task force has helped in creating law enforcement training dealing with human trafficking, methods to strengthen state laws, and recommendations on ways to identify and provide services to victims.

We believe that both the federal government and the state of Texas must play a role in raising awareness of human trafficking because this crime knows no bounds. It occurs at our national borders, spreads into our communities, and continues across state boundary lines and even onto the Internet. The federal and state governments should provide the necessary resources for victims and victim service providers and should help facilitate restitution for trafficking victims. In addition, the federal and state governments should help raise awareness of this crime's impact on our nation. The problem of human trafficking cannot be dealt with at only one level of government. It will take the cooperation of all relevant local, state, and federal government entities to truly make an impact in combating human trafficking in the United States.

The federal government has sought to inhibit the practice of minor sex trafficking for decades. According to the United States Department of Justice's Criminal Division, federal law has prohibited the transportation of minors across state lines for the purpose of committing illegal sex acts since 1910.[1] Not only has the U.S. faced an internal increase in minor sex trafficking, but we face an incursion of international victims of sex trafficking as well. The Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the Justice Department notes that, as a nation, we lack the comprehensive research necessary to verify accurate numbers of children engaged in prostitution.[2]

Texas is a leader among the states in its effort to end human trafficking. Texas was one of the first states to criminalize human trafficking and has continued to make great strides towards ending this heinous crime. But so much more needs to be done. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Texas accounts for 25 percent of all human trafficking victims.[3] In 2008, 38 percent of all calls to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline were from Texas.[4] It is particularly children who desperately need our help to protect them from this modern-day slavery and why this issue of the *Journal of Applied Research on Children* is so vital. During this 82nd Texas Legislative Session we must again put human trafficking at the top of our list of priorities, focusing specifically on minor victims of trafficking in Texas.

The six articles featured in this issue of the *Journal of Applied Research on Children* provide an overview of the expansive scope of

issues surrounding human trafficking. Researchers and policy-makers must not only consider ways to prevent human trafficking, but should also look at which individuals exhibit the greatest risk of being trafficked; how trafficking may affect an individual's future; and the occurrence of trafficking within the U.S. and internationally. In addition, it is important to understand why the demand for such practice exists and how we can better prepare our healthcare policies and professionals for responding to victims of human trafficking. We will continue to be a voice in Washington and in the State of Texas for victims and victim advocates to provide the needed resources for victims around the country and to draw attention to growing concerns surrounding human trafficking.

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