



VIRGINIA BILL PASSES THE HOUSE: DETERS CRIMINAL SEX TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN

Delegate Tim Hugo's HB 1898 changes Virginia statutes

Richmond, VA—HB 1898 sponsored by Virginia Del. Tim Hugo passed the House today, bringing the state closer to improving access to justice for child victims of sex trafficking in Virginia.

HB 1898 brings Virginia's laws closer to the national standards outlined in the Shared Hope International Protected Innocence Initiative, which assesses a state's legislative framework for the protection of children from domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST). HB 1898 improves Virginia's ability to deter criminal sex trafficking of children and the response to the victims. It does the following:

- ✧ raises the age of a child who can be the victim of sex trafficking to 18 to be consistent with the definition of a minor;
- ✧ prevents criminals from asserting a defense that a minor consented to the sexual exploitation;
- ✧ brings protection to the victims of sex trafficking who testify in a prosecution of their exploiter by preventing questioning about their past sexual behavior as reputation evidence ("rape shield" rule);
- ✧ increases the penalty for those who use a child to manufacture child pornography.

"I want to live in a place that my daughters and all children are safe from those criminals who would sexually exploit them for money," Del. Tim Hugo explained. "This law will deter the criminals preying on so many children in our country from coming after our children— they are not welcome in Virginia."

"At least 100,000 American children are exploited through prostitution in the United States every year," said Linda Smith (U.S. Congress 1994-98), founder and president of Shared Hope International. "This bill brings Virginia's laws closer to the national standard of legislative protection for children from sex trafficking. It recognizes that all children are worthy of protection from sex trafficking and this protection needs to be delivered at the state level through strong state laws."

Tina Frundt, executive director of Courtney's House and Shae's Place in Northern Virginia and survivor of DMST providing services and, soon, shelter to children victimized through commercial sexual exploitation, explains, "Sex trafficking happens in Virginia. I work each day with the children who are exploited through prostitution, pornography and sexual performance trying to repair the damage and make them whole again. This bill brings protection to the victims who want to pursue justice against their exploiter, empowering them in the process."

ABOUT SHARED HOPE INTERNATIONAL: Shared Hope International was founded in 1998, by former U.S. Congresswoman Linda Smith. We are leaders in a worldwide effort to prevent and eradicate sex trafficking and slavery using a three-pronged strategy: prevent, rescue & restore, and bring justice. For more information about Shared Hope International, and the *Protected Innocence Initiative*, go to www.sharedhope.org.

For additional information:

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