

Getting Media to Cover Anti-Trafficking Legislation in 2011

Media play an important role in educating the public. As your organization looks for ways to support the “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Deterrence and Victims Support Act of 2011,” consider personally reaching out to media to encourage them to cover this bill. Here is some information that will help you discuss the bill and tips on engaging media.

Overview of the “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Deterrence and Victims Support Act of 2011”, S.596:

- It will provide \$2m to \$2.5m a year in funding to six state and local pilot projects to serve and shelter child victims of sex trafficking
- Applying entities must have a multidisciplinary, collaborative plan to combat the sex trafficking of minors
- 67% of funds must be used for direct services and shelter for victims
- Funds can be used to empower law enforcement efforts to combat the sex trafficking of children
- This is a bipartisan bill
- This legislation is sponsored by Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) in the Senate and was introduced on March 16, 2011.

How this bill will help address existing domestic minor sex trafficking challenges:

Challenge: There is little collaboration and communication between the various agencies and organizations that encounter or work with sex trafficked children. This lack of collaboration is a major impediment to efficiency and finding workable solutions.

How this bill helps: This legislation requires multidisciplinary collaboration from grantees.

Challenge: Law enforcement has expressed frustration that when they discover an exploited child, there is nowhere safe to put her for help.

How this bill helps: With at least 67% of funding required for shelter and services for victims, the grant locations will have to address the issue of safe shelter for victims.

Challenge: Sex trafficked children have a multitude of needs ranging from post-traumatic stress and depression to STDs, substance abuse and chronic illness. They also may not have a safe, appropriate home to return to. There are few programs appropriate to address their needs. As a result, they are caught in a cycle of abuse and arrest.

How this bill helps: The majority of funding is required to go to services and shelter for victims. Additionally, the bill’s multidisciplinary focus will result in all stakeholders coming together to collaborate on fixing the current response, making it more efficient, and addressing the intense needs of these children.

Challenge: Trafficking cases are time intensive and can be expensive. The trafficking of minors is a federal offense yet federal law enforcement is reliant on local police to find these cases. Local law enforcement needs the resources and training so they can identify a trafficking case. Second, if law enforcement doesn’t have the resources to investigate trafficking cases, criminals will continue to believe there is no risk and a profitable reward for selling children for sex.

How this bill helps: By allowing funds to be used for training and law enforcement/prosecutor salaries related to sex trafficking cases, the bill is supporting enforcement efforts.

Tips for getting media to cover the bill:

While most coverage of the issue of domestic minor sex trafficking can be helpful, media focus on the tragic nature of this issue can make the public feel frustrated and incapable of making a difference. Therefore, when media covers domestic minor sex trafficking, reach out and encouraged them to talk about this federal legislation as well. Such coverage can: increase the public's awareness of the issue; generate support for passage of the bill; and bring attention to the great work being done by local organizations such as yours. Below are some tips for increasing coverage of this legislation and the issue in general by media.

- Send out a **press release** to local and state television, print and radio outlets to announce that this bill has been introduced. Describe the main points of the legislation. Be sure to include some details on how the legislation will help address some of the major challenges we face in combating child sex trafficking. Some of those have been included in this document. Follow up to make sure that the press release was received and ask to speak with a reporter who covers human trafficking/criminal justice/human rights issues. It's advisable to identify a specific reporter in advance. Call the journalist directly and alert him/her to the press release and discuss the issue in further detail.
- Talking to media:
 - Any time you speak with media about human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of children remember to mention this legislation. It could also fit into a conversation about juvenile justice or runaway and homeless youth. Reporters who are covering such a story will want to know about the legislation and may have questions for you.
 - If you know of a reporter who has covered the issue of human trafficking, or child sex trafficking in specific, or is generally interested in human rights topics, call him/her up to discuss the bill. Reporters who have previously covered the issue will likely be very interested in reporting on legislation designed to address the problem.
 - If a congressperson in your community is co-sponsoring the bill, it would be especially helpful if you could reach out to your local media outlets. Chances are high that reporters would be interested in covering federal legislation officially supported by a member of Congress representing your state. You can find the list of bill cosponsors here: <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s112-596>
 - If your federal senators or representatives are not yet co-sponsoring the legislation, feel free to use this as an opportunity to encourage his or her support, i.e. "Our organization is very supportive of this bill and hope Senator XXX will join it as a co-sponsor really soon. We know he/she really cares about the children in our community." Keep it positive by encouraging support, not maligning or attacking the member.
 - If you learn that something has happened related to the issue of sex trafficking and it has not been reported on, e.g. a pimp or brothel where young girls are kept is busted or a girl is freed, you could notify the press to cover both that occurrence as well as to discuss the legislation as a potential remedy.
 - Reporters often like to put a face on issues of legislation. If you know of a survivor of trafficking who would be willing to speak to the press about the importance of the legislation, then you should mention this to any reporter you speak with about the bill.
 - Did you see recent coverage of child sex trafficking that upset you? Reporters often use inappropriate or offensive language to refer to child victims of sex trafficking. They also get facts wrong about legislation. A headline like "*Teen hookers arrested in police sting*" shouldn't go without objections. Reach out to journalists who write such articles and establish a connection. Educate them on the issue and explain why it's important for them to use correct terminology. If they got something wrong, correct them. You can also use it as an opportunity to talk about the federal bill.

- **Editorials** are a great way to drum up support for an issue. If a paper in your community recently covered a story on human trafficking (especially domestic minor sex trafficking) then it may be particularly interested in running an editorial on this legislation. Keep in mind when **writing an editorial**:
- Read the newspaper/website rules on editorial submissions.
 - Read a few editorials that have been published to get a sense of what they choose to publish.
 - Refer back, if possible, to a recent article or coverage from that media source. This will help tie it in to what media outlet sees as worthy of space. It will also help make your editorial more compelling.
 - Be careful of length. If the newspaper or website has a specific word limit, keep to it.
 - Don't try to cover too much. This issue is complex; it's easy to get tangential. Be concise.
 - Use editorials to dispel myths in recent coverage. This is a critical moment to educate the public since editorials are one of the most popular sections of newspapers.
 - Assume your readers will know nothing about domestic minor sex trafficking. That is not to say this is a moment to educate the reader on everything. However, it is a moment to be sure you're not talking above the head of the average reader of that publication or website.