



Terebinth
REFUGE

A Shelter for Hope and Healing

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3.27.23

Chair Pinto and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN. 55155

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the Children & Families Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of HF 1858 which would provide additional critical resources for some of the most vulnerable people in our state-youth who are being sex trafficked.

My name is Cynthia (CeCe) Terlouw Kvistad. I am the Founder and Executive Director of Terebinth Refuge, a shelter and safe home providing healing holistic services to youth 18-24 years and adult women 24 and older, who have been sexually exploited and or trafficked. We are also a partner in the state's Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response. We are located in the St. Cloud community and serve women in the central MN area and throughout the state.

It goes without saying that Minnesota's children and youth should not be bought and sold for sex. I know it is hard to believe that it happens in our state, but it does. The average age of entry into being trafficked is young - between the ages of 12-14. We at Terebinth Refuge see many women who missed out on Safe Harbor services and now as older youth and adults are struggling to overcome the steep barriers.

Sex trafficking is a horrific issue in our state. In 2019 the Minnesota Student Survey found that 5,000 Minnesota 9th and 11th graders have experienced sexual exploitation. This number is an undercount in that it only represents two grade levels and only the youth who happened to be in school at this time and who felt comfortable enough answering the question.

But there is so much hope in our state for victims of trafficking. You helped us pass our Safe Harbor Law back in 2011 which decriminalizes "prostitution" offenses for youth under the age of 18 and provides safe and trauma informed services, shelter and housing programs to help these incredible young people heal and accomplish the goals they have for themselves. We are so grateful for this amazing progress but our youth need more.

On behalf of the Youth Services Network we are asking for an increase of \$9 million for additional street outreach workers, emergency shelter beds and housing, an additional \$9 million for supportive services such as mental health therapy/CD counseling/educational and vocational programs and an additional \$2 million to expand the Regional Navigator Program. All of these investments would provide our state with the opportunity to get additional victims of sex trafficking into safe and supportive environments where they can heal and accomplish their goals.

Please use some of the surplus to invest in their safety and futures and support of HF 1858.

Sincerely,



... "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor" Isaiah 61:3