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For Immediate Release

May 14, 2015

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Safe Harbor legislation is being introduced at just the right time given other movements forward to help child victims of sex trafficking. Stories and police reports about these young people, who are among Wisconsin's most vulnerable, have moved the legislature to garner bi-partisan support for two excellent bills introduced by Republican legislators passed in the last two legislative sessions. The governor also included \$2 million for trafficked youth with a focus on rural areas in the proposed state budget. We support that momentum continuing with the Safe Harbor legislation, **LRB-0733**, that Representative Jill Billings and Representative La Tonya Johnson just introduced and that needs co-sponsors.

Representative Billings wrote the following in a May 11 press release:

The bill prohibits the charging of a minor with the crime of prostitution. By adopting a Safe Harbor law Wisconsin will no longer conflict with the Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which treats coerced children as victims, even if they have engaged in criminal prostitution activity. The bill also aligns the discrepancy in current Wisconsin statutory rape and child enticement provisions which declare children unable to consent to sexual activity.

Under current Wisconsin law, the Department of Children's and Families is permitted, but not required to investigate reports of child abuse when the abuse is carried out by a "non-caregiver". LRB-0733 would require an investigation by a child welfare agency, in cases where a child is suspected of being forced to engage in prostitution.

The consensus we have heard among human service professionals and at meetings with the Department of Children and Family Services and the Department of Justice is that we need change. The Safe Harbor bill is another excellent bill that moves Wisconsin in the right direction for that change.

We hope for legislators from both parties to join in as co-sponsors for this important legislation to continue in the right direction for helping sex trafficked youth.

For more information on anti-trafficking bills passed in the last two session:

<http://fox11online.com/2014/04/23/governor-signs-human-trafficking-bill/>

<http://fox6now.com/2015/04/08/governor-scott-walker-signs-11-bills-into-law-at-the-capitol/> (go to AB16)

For Safe Harbor full press release: http://www.thewheelerreport.com/wheeler_docs/files/0511johnson.pdf