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## Exited Prostitution Survivor Policy Platform

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# Exited Prostitution Survivor Policy Platform

## Abstract

Survivors of prostitution propose a policy reform platform including three main pillars of priority: criminal justice reforms, fair employment, and standards of care. The sexual exploitation of prostituted individuals has lasting effects which can carry over into many aspects of life. In order to remedy these effects and give survivors the opportunity to live a full and free life, we must use a survivor-centered approach to each of these pillars to create change. First, reform is necessary in the criminal justice system to recognize survivors as victims of crime and not perpetrators, while holding those who exploited them fully responsible. Second, reform is necessary to assist survivors in finding fair employment by offering vocational training, financial counseling, and educational scholarships, as well as offering employment opportunities that utilize survivors' vast array of skills and interests. Finally, standards of care for survivors exiting prostitution should focus on supporting survivors in our journeys and support short- and long-term resources that empower us. These systemic changes are necessary to recognize survivors as the valuable human beings we are and to support survivors in fulfilling our vast potential.

## Keywords

prostitution, human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, exit services, criminal justice reform, Nordic model, fair employment, standards of care, trafficking survivors, survivors of prostitution

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## EDITORIAL

### EXITED PROSTITUTION SURVIVOR POLICY PLATFORM

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#### ABSTRACT

Survivors of prostitution propose a policy reform platform including three main pillars of priority: criminal justice reforms, fair employment, and standards of care. The sexual exploitation of prostituted individuals has lasting effects which can carry over into many aspects of life. In order to remedy these effects and give survivors the opportunity to live a full and free life, we must use a survivor-centered approach to each of these pillars to create change. First, reform is necessary in the criminal justice system to recognize survivors as victims of crime and not perpetrators, while holding those who exploited them fully responsible. Second, reform is necessary to assist survivors in finding fair employment by offering vocational training, financial counseling, and educational scholarships, as well as offering employment opportunities that utilize survivors' vast array of skills and interests. Finally, standards of care for survivors exiting prostitution should focus on supporting survivors in our journeys and support short- and long-term resources that empower us. These systemic changes are necessary to recognize survivors as the valuable human beings we are and to support survivors in fulfilling our vast potential.

## KEYWORDS

prostitution, human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, exit services, criminal justice reform, Nordic model, fair employment, standards of care, trafficking survivors, survivors of prostitution

The sexual exploitation of prostituted individuals has resulted in the inability of those who survive to attain the full potential of life, freedom, and happiness. Remedying the lasting effects of this form of exploitation has yet to be realized fully. We need a survivor-centered movement that focuses on the consequences of experiencing sexual commodification and creates solutions to ending sexual exploitation. A survivor-centered approach will provide concrete solutions to the harm caused by prostitution. The core tenets of the platform we (a collaborative group of survivors spanning races, ages, lived experiences, professional expertise, and political leanings) have identified centers on respect, dignity, and the simple fact that consensual sex is not bought, sold, or traded.

Our intention in issuing this unified declaration is to urge stakeholder groups to endorse comprehensive policies based on three Pillars of Priority: 1) Reforms to our nation's criminal justice approach to prostitution; 2) Fair employment for survivors; and 3) Essential standards of care for people exiting the sex trade.

### **Pillar 1: Criminal Justice Reforms**

Structural violence, including institutionalized racism and patriarchy, perpetuate the damage done to survivors of prostitution. Most central of these structures is the criminal justice system's insistence on the arrest and prosecution of prostituted people. Simply put, the criminal status of prostituted people prevents us from meeting our basic needs and keeps us trapped in "the life." In the United States, people with criminal convictions are barred from jobs ranging from cutting hair to caring for toddlers. A criminal record will prevent you from getting a student loan or qualifying for public housing. Virtually any potential employer can access this information, so prostitution convictions routinely lock us out of decent jobs let alone professional careers.

Laws creating a process for prostituted people to erase these convictions are known as "vacatur" provisions, from the Latin term meaning "to set aside a judgment." Vacatur laws are essential to undo injustices that many survivors face when they are branded as criminals, rather than as victims of crime. As of March 2018, 39 U.S. states had vacatur laws allowing victims of sex trafficking to erase old prostitution convictions ("Protecting Victims," 2018). Few states have vacatur provisions allowing a prostituted person to eliminate her criminal record without proving she is also a victim of human trafficking.

As it stands, the language and application of the U.S. legal regime on prostitution becomes a proverbial millstone around our necks. Essential services to help people in prostitution escape "the life" are often tied to a conviction itself. For example, a court can facilitate access to services, such as substance abuse assistance or mental health treatment as part of resolving a charge against a defendant, thereby tacitly acknowledging that the defendant was in a position of vulnerability when arrested. However, treatment programs and other requirements to complete probation or parole, are not always a form of diversion which allows for charges to be dropped upon successful completion. Rather, the prostitution survivor will

typically be convicted, with the successful completion of court ordered requirements only reducing jail or prison time, with the survivor still winding up with a criminal record, despite getting an opportunity to begin recovery via court-ordered treatment. Without an opportunity for vacatur and the elimination of a criminal record, the American legal system has labelled the survivor a criminal, a brand that can last forever.

The impact of the criminalization of women within the sex trade reduces us to an object in pejorative “humor”; we are the whores, hookers, and sluts at the butt of jokes; and, the scapegoat for men’s bad behavior. Not coincidentally, we are also subjected to oppression, hardship, and mistreatment beyond measure. We are exploited by sex buyers and pimps, harassed by the public, abused by insensitive police and uninformed judges. The situation we find ourselves in is unjust, and we are condemned to suffer because we are seen as perpetrators instead of survivors. Our suffering is not negligible or diminutive in nature; we bear the consequences of policymakers’ negligence in acknowledging our status as victims. The burdens we carry due to criminalization include poverty, homelessness, economic inequity, racial inequity, and myriad additional forms of trauma and oppression. Systemic violence and institutionalized oppression in our social, legal, and economic institutions have pushed us to the margins and seared our exploitation into our souls, branding us just as surely as many of us were branded—through coerced tattoos declaring ownership—by our exploiters.

Historically, some of the most vulnerable within our society have been criminalized. Evidence of this can be found in the alarming rates of incarceration of prostituted women, who are often incarcerated for related offenses like drug offenses and other minor offenses. Even when we are classified as victims of trafficking we are too often charged with non-violent co-occurring crimes, further aggravating our negative circumstances, increasing the barriers to exit, and increasing the likelihood of re-entering into prostitution. Often it is not until after the exploitation has occurred, and the violence inflicted is finally deemed “bad enough” that law enforcement will bother to classify the exploited person as a victim. This does little to prevent us from being forced back into prostitution, and it does nothing to abate the stigma and associated depression that becomes a very real part of our day-to-day lives.

While there has been some focus of late on clearing wrongful criminal records, greater pressure must be applied to the judicial system to recognize that we are the victims of exploitation in the first place. It should not be as hard as it typically is to prove that we are victims, as even a dual victim-perpetrator status in the eyes of the law makes getting on with our lives impossible. Diversion and exit services mean little to nothing when you are branded a felon.

At the same time, when the crime of exploiting us holds such little significance that it is categorized as a simple misdemeanor, our perpetrator is a “john,” our suffering is dismissed as minimal, and the men who bought us are freed of blame for the many negative consequences we suffered. This is not justice—it is exploitation. When it is a more severe crime to buy a stolen car than it is to buy our bodies for sex, we assign greater value to a stolen vehicle than to the lives of women and girls trapped in the sex trade.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) must do in practice what it was created to do: protect victims of exploitation (22 U.S.C. § 78). We cannot criminalize the victim. Nor is it enough to combat the trafficker when more traffickers will

rise to power in response to “demand.” The sex trade is incredibly lucrative. Unlike drugs and other illegal goods, which can be sold and abused only once, our bodies can be sold and abused time and time again. The TVPA was designed to help survivors of exploitation, not to be a token law. The TVPA states that victims “should not be inappropriately incarcerated, fined, or otherwise penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked” (22 U.S.C. § 7101(19)). We demand robust examination of existing federal and state laws looking to establish uniformity in the legal responses to victims of this crime. Not merely to clear or expunge our criminal backgrounds but to completely vacate our convictions and arrests in totality. Remedying these legal wrongs is the only fair and just recourse for the wrongs that have been done to us.

The Nordic Model, increasingly known as the Abolitionist or Equality model, is the most effective policy framework for achieving restorative justice when adjudicating prostitution-related offenses. The Nordic Model puts into practice what countries around the world recommended through the Palermo Protocol Article 9. This provision states that”

[p]arties shall adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, including through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking (Palermo Protocol, 2000).

The Nordic Model recognizes that human trafficking is a demand driven industry, and it can only be eradicated by focusing on demand. The Nordic Model decriminalizes all those who are prostituted, provides exit services, and makes buying people for sex a criminal offence (Nordic Model Now, 2018). Buyers are those principally responsible for commercial sexual exploitation—we have a responsibility as a society to acknowledge as much. Thus, perpetrators must bear the burden of making victimized individuals whole, whether through increased fines and fees to pay for victim services or by bearing the shame that is inherently the buyers. A model by which the perpetrator of the crime is the one paying for the restoration of his victims can be self-sustaining, reduce re-offending, and negate the incentive for traffickers and pimps to continue supplying new victims to this system of violence.

We see this policy approach as the only viable solution to the devastating inequity arising from prostitution, seeing as it has become a normalized societal practice. It upholds the values stated in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms

faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and [is] determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...

Prostitution in all its forms is an abuse of power and is defined as such in the Palermo Protocol under Article 3 (Dempsey, 2015; Palermo Protocol, 2000). Particularly relevant is Article 3(b), which states that:

[t]he consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article *shall be irrelevant* where

any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used (emphasis added) (Palermo Protocol, 2000).

The buying of sex embodies the power imbalance inherent to the sex trade, which in itself is a profound violation of human rights. The sex trade, both legal and illegal, is a form of gender-based violence and a violation of our fundamental human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1949, Article 1 states that “all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations, 1948). Nowhere is this more routinely violated than in the sex trade, whose victims are predominantly women and girls from the most vulnerable populations. UDHR Article 3 declares everyone has “the right to life, liberty and security of person.” There is no liberty or security within the sex trade; though it is euphemistically called “the life,” it is no life at all. UDHR Article 4 says no one “shall be held in slavery or servitude and that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all forms.” Yet, the sex trade still exists unabated across the U.S. Finally, UDHR Article 5 demands that no one “shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.” If there is any other facet of society where human life is systematically degraded as it is in the sex trade, it would be as socially unacceptable as murder.

What little that has been done by governing bodies to stop this crime is often willfully ignorant at best, and blatantly misogynistic at worst. As survivors, we will not stand by and watch our sisters endure this any longer.

## **Pillar 2: Fair Employment**

One of the most persistent barriers to economic independence even after leaving prostitution is lack of gainful employment for survivors. This is not simply a problem of lackluster resumes, and certainly not due to a dearth of jobs. Fair employment opportunities for survivors in public agencies, both governmental and non-profit, are practically nonexistent. The government has a responsibility to survivors, and one way to make good on it is to ensure that its anti-trafficking funding is prioritized for agencies that support survivor employment in all anti-trafficking programs. To aid this process, government and public-private partnerships should increase opportunities for education and professional development for survivors.

There are innumerable organizations worldwide with missions stating an intent to combat human trafficking, prostitution, and/or exploitation of human beings. Yet there must be follow-through on dedicating resources to—and prioritizing—the sustainable employment of survivors. The survivors they passionately fight for must be at the table when discussing policy and strategic planning, not merely at trafficking events to tell their stories. Soliciting funding for survivors and non-survivor employees must be well thought out, respecting the survivors’ contributions, and going beyond titles of “consultant” or “advisor.” We want to be treated as key stakeholders with vested interests in the outcomes of the movement.

While we do not speak for all survivors, we, as seasoned women within the movement to end exploitation, have noticed a trend among survivors new to the movement that they think that speaking engagements are as good as it gets. It is our responsibility as survivors to work with these organizations to create a realistic, thoughtful, and healthy way of moving an audience to donate.

We must work together to support newly-disclosing survivors so they know when it’s safe for them to share their painful and often re-traumatizing

experiences. We, who have shared our stories, know that it must come from a place of confidence and our stories must tell a larger story than just our own. Telling our stories should not feel like self-mutilation. We, as a movement, must move beyond storytelling, honoring survivors for their lived experiences.

The United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking Annual Report of 2016 was the first ever report of its kind (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Written by 11 survivors of trafficking appointed by President Obama, it described five areas that need to be addressed to combat the crime. The fifth area is “Help Survivors Get On Track For Success In Work And Life.” The Advisory Council suggested offering more economic opportunities for survivors, whether in the form of vocational training, financial counseling, educational scholarships, or employment in federal agencies as staff or consultants. This collaborative group of survivors simply asks that the government takes these recommendations and put them into action.

### **Pillar 3: Standards of Care**

There are many complex and varied issues that affect survivors of trafficking, both medical and otherwise. An article by Lederer and Wetzel (2014) found alarming rates of injury and illness among sex trafficking victims. It does not require a stretch of imagination to infer that these adverse physical and psychological health impacts are the direct result of trauma from victims’ time within the sex trade. For example, a peer-reviewed article on traumatic brain injury (TBI) found that prostituted women suffer rates of TBI at much higher rates than the national average (Farley, Banks, Ackerman, & Golding, 2018).

We have already mentioned that survivors are subjected to sustained torture within the sex trade. Torture is defined as “the action or practice of inflicting severe pain on someone as a punishment or to force them to do or say something, or for the pleasure of the person inflicting the pain,” a phenomenon close to what is regularly described within prostitution experience. Through the lenses of our own experiences, torture and prostitution are synonymous. Those who bought us felt they had purchased our rights away from us. To them, we were no longer human; we were a disposable commodity, an object. Prostitution is torture, as its essence removes that which makes us human.

Each of these complex issues and more that affect survivors become a major challenge to providing comprehensive services (Vatne Bintliff, Stark, Diprete Brown, Alonso, 2018). Exit services must holistically address the devastating consequences surrounding and leading to prostitution—not just the act of being bought or sold. By the same token, our care cannot focus solely on our past, but must extend into our futures.

Services must treat conditions seriously in both a short- and long-term manner, providing resources to replace coping mechanisms in favor of coping skills. Services cannot just be designed to help us survive, but to empower us to control our lives. Short-term treatment should focus on managing and reducing frequency of distressing symptomology. Long-term treatment should allow for empowerment and liberation from continued oppression, neither of which is possible without social support. Much of the time, long-term services infantilize us and further our stigma by promoting our own negative self-image. We must strive for compassionate services that are strengths-based, and which push for more than just survival.



It is evident and disturbing to many of us within this collaboration that the movement to end exploitation has become sterile, clinical, and overly professionalized; as a result, it has forgotten that it began from the rape crisis movement. In a way, we as a community, have forgotten our foremothers who taught that healing goes far beyond a clinical diagnosis of mental health conditions or substance use disorder. Healing is liberation from systems of oppression. Therefore, the movement to end sexual exploitation, sex abuse, and sex trafficking should support survivors in their journeys to become their own leaders, rather than hushing us back to be handmaids of our own movement. This movement was built by us, for us, and on our backs... yet we are not the ones driving it forward.

## **Conclusion**

We as survivors of the sex trade have overcome the horrors of serial rape. We have overcome traumas from physical abuse. We have overcome re-victimization through serial arrest. We have overcome loss of self and family. We have overcome police brutality. We are overcomers and as such we are compelled to speak truth and effect change on behalf of our community and those still trapped in the sex trade. We, as a community, must counter the false dichotomy of “free” and “forced.” The intersection of prostitution, pornography, the stripping industry, and illicit massage are inextricably linked with sex trafficking. Without the demand for commercial sex there would be no sex trafficking. This is not “conflation”; it is simply fact. Survivors of exploitation are survivors of exploitation and we do not differentiate between legality and illegality of the vehicle used to commit atrocities against us. Commodification of human beings anywhere—whether on a street, via internet, in a brothel, at a massage parlor, at a strip club or through pornographic media—is the same to us. Humanity sees us as its least common denominator, the non-human disposable sex object.

We deserve more than this. We seek the best humanity has to offer in the realization of life. If we remove sexual commodification from existence, we end other systems of oppression far-reaching beyond prostitution and human trafficking. When we listen to and involve survivors in all policies that affect exploited persons, we find our humanity, manifested in priceless and endless contributions to society. Our empowerment is ours to take. Recognize that our empowerment, our freedom, our own choices belong to us and us alone. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “If you put a chain around the neck of a slave, the other end fastens itself around your own” (1841). We are taking off the chains around our necks, so we can in turn assist you in removing the chains from yours, because your liberation is tied to our liberation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The authors thank the following people for reviewing and providing critical feedback and funding a thoughtful feminist salon setting for our seedling thoughts to grow as this year-long labor of love—and pain—manifested: Alex Trouteaud, Autumn Burris, Catharine MacKinnon, Eleanor Kennelly Gaetan, Lauren Hersh, Swanee Hunt, Melissa Luna, Rachel Moran, Shea Rhodes, Stephanie Mersch, and Taina Bien Aimé.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

### **Marian Hatcher**

Marian Hatcher has worked for the Cook County, Illinois Sheriff's Office (CCSO) for 14 years currently serving as human trafficking policy analyst and victim advocate. She coordinates CCSO's anti-trafficking efforts such as the "National Johns Suppression Initiative," a nationwide effort with over 100 arresting agencies and more than 200 partners targeting sex buyers as the driving force of sex trafficking and prostitution. She also coordinates and provides direct service for victims of human trafficking, on call 24/7. Hatcher has provided training to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigations and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Senator Richard Durbin honored her as part of Black History Month, 2018, in the Congressional Record. Last year, Hatcher was granted Executive Clemency by Governor Bruce Rauner for drug and prostitution offenses related to her exploitation. Hatcher's story of survival and policy leadership have been featured in numerous documentaries including Oprah Winfrey Network's "Prostitution: Leaving the Life"; Sheryl WuDunn and Nicholas Kristof's "A Path Appears"; Mary Mazzio's "I am Jane Doe"; *The Guardian's* "The Trap: The Deadly Sex Trafficking Cycle in American Prisons" and, most recently, "From Liberty to Captivity." She received the 2016 Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award for Volunteer Service from President Barack Obama. In 2014, she was awarded Shared Hope International's Path Breaker Award, presented to dedicated policy makers tackling the demand that drives domestic minor sex trafficking.

### **Alisa L. Bernard**

Alisa Bernard is director of education and partnerships for the Organization for Prostitution Survivors (OPS), Seattle, Washington, managing the organization with two co-directors. For OPS, she focuses on community engagement and education regarding sexual exploitation, as well as partnerships, fund development, and policy advocacy. She developed a unique online skill building and empowerment mentoring series for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). Since exiting prostitution, she has advised organizations and agencies across the U.S. including Demand Abolition and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. She is a member of King County's Ending Exploitation Collaborative team, serves as a member of King County's CSEC Taskforce, and sits on the SAFE in Washington advisory board. She is an MPA candidate at The University of Washington. Her commentary has been featured in *The Seattle Times* and other online and print media.

### **Allison Franklin**

Allison Franklin offers support and direct mentorship to women, men, and children who are survivors of sexual exploitation and the commercial sex industry. Her involvement began in Texas, but she is now called on across the country, as a speaker and survivor consultant for the National Criminal Justice Training Center. One area of expertise is the co-morbidity of drug abuse and mental health issues with sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. Franklin works with numerous stakeholders to find innovative solutions to abolish modern slavery.

### **Audrey Morrissey**

Audrey Morrissey is associate director of My Life My Choice in Boston, Massachusetts, and director of the National Survivor Leadership Program at My Life My Choice. She also serves as the primary national trainer for the organization. Morrissey created My Life My Choice's

Survivor Mentoring Program in 2004 as the first survivor leader formally selected to mentor adolescent girls in Massachusetts. As a local and national leader in the field of exploitation, Ms. Morrissey has served as Co-Chair of the Victim Services Committee of the Massachusetts Task Force on Human Trafficking and as a primary consultant to the Massachusetts Administrative Office of the Trial Court's "Redesigning the Court's Response to Prostitution" project. Morrissey is a 2008 recipient of the prestigious Petra Foundation Fellowship and a 2012 recipient of The Philanthropic Initiative's Boston Neighborhood Fellows Award.

### **Beth Jacobs**

Beth Jacobs is a survivor of child sex trafficking who earned a degree in social work, leading to over 15 years helping victims of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation become survivors and leaders. She spearheaded the Offenders' Prostitution Program (John school) in St. Paul Minnesota; started Willow Way in Tucson, Arizona, to help sexually exploited people; and collaborated with county courts and police in Arizona to create Project Raise, as an alternative to jail for prostituted and sex trafficked people. At the national and state levels, she has advocated for more effective legislation, especially to update laws against human trafficking. She is a National Survivor Network policy champion and has worked for the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST). Jacobs is a field trainer for Truckers Against Trafficking as well as a field instructor for social work students at Winona State University and the Alfred Adler Institute. Jacobs was a speaker at the first International Meeting for Human Trafficking Survivors held in Cali, Columbia in 2014.

### **Cherie Jimenez**

As an activist and survivor, Cherie Jimenez used her own experiences to develop the EVA Center, Boston, Massachusetts ([evacenter.org](http://evacenter.org)), a survivor-led exit program for women caught in systems of prostitution and sex trafficking, which she founded in 2006. Today, in partnership with the City of Boston, it provides one of the few survivor-run emergency housing programs in the United States. Jimenez is a member of SPACE, an international group of survivors working toward an end to sexual exploitation by advocating for passage of Nordic Model legislation. She has traveled internationally with other survivors to educate policymakers since SPACE began in 2012. Through the EVA Center, Jimenez is an active member of the Paris-based Coalition to Abolish Prostitution, which brings together 23 organizations from 18 countries to create a world free from commercial sexual exploitation.

### **Kathi Hardy**

Kathi Hardy founded Freedom From Exploitation (FFE) in 2002 to create change in San Diego County, California, for people exploited and victimized by the sex industry. It is one of the oldest survivor founded, survivor led organizations in the U.S. The organization grew out of Hardy's work with the San Diego City Attorney's Office, where she served as a peer advocate and created a recovery group program. Today, women and girls are referred to FFE by the superior courts of San Diego, juvenile court, probation officers, attorneys, and social workers. Girls from the child protection system have also been served by FFE as well as transgender Latino women who participated in a unique pilot program. For the last two years, FFE has worked closely with women incarcerated and under detention using a 10-lesson curriculum written by human trafficking victims for trafficking victims called "Ending the Game."

### **Marlene Carson**

Dr. Marlene Carson is a victim, survivor, minister, and founder of Rahab's Hideaway in Columbus, Ohio. At age 15 she became one of the thousands of girls and young women exploited daily. Through faith in Christ and sound biblical teaching, Marlene's misery became a ministry to hurting teen girls and women who seek to be free. Rehab's Hideaway, founded in 2008, is a restorative housing program that provides critical solutions and a way out for those who have become victims of human trafficking. Carson's work has been featured by the CNN Freedom Project as well as on the Oprah Winfrey Show. She has educated audiences around the world about the scope and nature of human trafficking; trafficking routes, trends, and patterns; and rule of law issues such as corruption, money laundering, pimp control, and transnational criminal activity.

### **Nikki Bell**

Nicole Bell is the founder and chief executive officer of Living in Freedom Together, Inc. (LIFT), a survivor-led, non-profit organization based in Worcester, Massachusetts, dedicated to helping individuals exit and recover from commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Her focus began with women who were exploited in street-level prostitution, recognizing the lack of appropriate, compassionate, and individualized services available. Bell provides direct service and advocacy. She is in the process of opening a treatment program for survivors who are suffering with Substance Use Disorder. Bell also serves as co-chair of the Worcester Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (WAASE); sits on the Executive Council for World Without Exploitation; co-facilitates the DAWN (Developing Alternatives for Women Now) program, and the CARD (Community Action to Reduce Demand) program. Bell has received numerous awards for her work including: Worcester Magazine's Hometown Hero, WAASE Advocate of the Year 2016, and Worcester Woman of Consequence 2016. She is featured in *The Guardian's* recent documentary "The Trap: The Deadly Sex Trafficking Cycle in American Prisons."

### **Rebecca Bender**

Rebecca Bender is the founder and CEO of the Rebecca Bender Initiative (RBI, [www.rebeccabender.org](http://www.rebeccabender.org)). After escaping nearly six years of human trafficking, she wrote her first book, *Roadmap to Redemption*, followed by her recent curriculum "Elevate." RBI's advanced training has equipped the FBI, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Former President Jimmy Carter, local law enforcement, medical professionals, service providers, and faith communities across America. Bender serves as an advisor to both the Oregon Department of Justice Human Trafficking Council and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She is also the recipient of the Female Overcomer Award, Unlikely Hero Award, Hero to our Generation Award and multiple FBI and Congressional recognitions. Bender has been featured on the Today Show and NBC Deadline Crimes, as well as in Forbes, Huffington Post, and Sports Illustrated. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and their four daughters, and is currently finishing her Master's degree.

### **Rebekah Charleston**

Rebekah Charleston is executive director of Valiant Hearts, a Texas-based non-profit dedicated to eradicating sexual exploitation. She is also a consultant with the National Criminal Justice Training Center, an honors graduate student, an advocate for victims of human trafficking, and a mother. At the age of 17, she ran away and became a victim of human trafficking for more than ten years. She had multiple traffickers and was not able to escape until federal authorities finally became involved. In 2012, she completed a

program offered by Valiant Hearts. Charleston is the recipient of the Survivor Leader Award in 2016, and has been featured in many media accounts of human trafficking including Deadline Crimes.

### **Shamere McKenzie**

Shamere McKenzie is the chief executive officer for Sun Gate Foundation, an anti-trafficking organization that provides educational opportunities for survivors of human trafficking. She is also co-chair of the victim's services committee of the Maryland State Human Trafficking Task Force. This year, McKenzie responded to a call from the Ministry of Justice in her birthplace, Jamaica, and currently serves as an ambassador for Jamaica in the fight against human trafficking. She has trained a variety of professionals on how to identify and respond to victims of human trafficking, including the FBI, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, as well as churches, hotels and airline staff. A documentary featuring her experience in sex trafficking "False Promises" was released in Aruba last September. She serves on the speaker's bureau for the Fredrick Douglas Family Initiative and Survivors of Slavery organizations. Shamere is member of the National Survivor Network, the GEMS Survivor Leadership Institute, the Survivor Alliance and a mentor to survivors of sex trafficking. McKenzie is a 2015 graduate of Loyola University Chicago with her Bachelor of Science degree in criminology and criminal justice

### **Vednita Carter**

Vednita Carter founded Breaking Free in St. Paul, Minnesota, whose mission is to end all forms of prostitution and sex trafficking. She has extensive experience in developing, planning, and implementing programs for sex trafficked women and girls and training law enforcement, including the FBI. She was awarded the prestigious Norma Hotaling Award for her life-long service to victims of sex trafficking. She has traveled to Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America to educate service providers and community members about Breaking Free's pioneering work and to help others create similar programs. In 2016 Carter received "The Life Time Achievement Award" from President Obama for the outstanding work she has done over the 25 years to end the sex trafficking of women and girls. In 2014, Vednita was awarded the Path Breaker Award from Shared Hope International for her tireless efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex and was named a CNN Hero for her work in ending sexual exploitation of women and girls in the US. In 2015 Vednita Carter graduated from the CICA International University and Seminary and received an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity, Ambassador-at-Large and Chaplaincy. The school is the first and only full gospel organization with special status with the United Nations.

### **RECOMMENDED CITATION**

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