

**WOMEN'S
POLICY
GROUP**

*Focus
Series*

Stop Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Georgia's Children

Metropolitan Atlanta has become a national hub for child prostitution and trafficking. Youth from around the state, other states, and several countries are brought into the metro Atlanta area for the sole purpose of being inducted into the sex trade. It is a problem affecting all communities in Georgia, regardless of class, status, race, or culture; crippling our children's emotional, physical, and mental growth.

Half of all Atlanta area prostitutes are children, ranging in age from 11 to 16. Many youth are lured into prostitution as a way to escape abusive families. Children who are commercially sexually exploited often become victims of violent crime and are at greater risk for substance abuse, depression, suicide, psychiatric disorders, pregnancy, and physical health issues.

Georgia needs legislation to combat this growing problem. SR 445 (Unterman 45th) would create a joint study committee comprised of legislators and community leaders. The committee will study best practices and consult with experts from a variety of experts from the fields of child welfare, juvenile justice, social work, mental health, and public health to recommend action.

Services for children who have been trafficked and commercially sexually exploited are needed. Currently, when youth are caught, they end up in secure detention centers because there are almost no services available to work with this population. Research shows child victims can grow into productive adults with intense therapeutic services.

FY2008 budget request of \$700,000 would establish a regional assessment center. This center would be a safe place where prostituted children could leave the streets, start to heal, be fully assessed and referred to the

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services that they need. The center would also serve as a resource for law enforcement. Often officers are reluctant to pick up prostituted children because there is no appropriate, safe place to take them. Any funds appropriated by the General Assembly would be disbursed to an appropriate vendor through a competitive request for proposal process.

Seizure and sale of vehicles used in sex crimes against children is another possible funding mechanism for services. SB 219 (Hamrick 30th) gives law enforcement authorities the power to do just that. The seizure and sale of cars used in criminal activity is a common procedure in other types of cases involving illegal drugs, organized crime, and human trafficking. This bill reduces the ability of child molesters to use cars as a way to physically reach their victims. It also allows for the sale of seized cars, which will provide additional funding for law enforcement, witness support services, prosecution of crimes, and substance abuse education and rehabilitation programs.

Community awareness is on the rise. Georgians Against Child Prostitution and Trafficking is a coalition of more than sixteen community, church, and child advocacy groups. Coalition partners are committed to ending commercial sexual exploitation of children and improving services to minors who are trafficked from around the state, from other states, and countries into Georgia.

SOURCES: Priebe, Alexandra & Suhr, Christen (2005). "Hidden in Plain View: the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls in Atlanta." Boxill, N.A. and Richardson, D.J. (2005). "A Community's Response to the Sex Trafficking of Children." Child Welfare League of America, *The Link*, 3(4):1-9. Klain, E.J. (1999). "Prostitution of Children and Child-Sex Tourism: An Analysis of Domestic and International Responses," Nat'l Center for Missing and Exploited Children, U.S. Dept. of Justice. Friedman, S. (2005). "Who Is There To Help: How the System Fails Sexually Exploited Girls in the United States," ECPAT-USA, Inc. Saywitz, K.J., Mannarino, A.P. et al (2000). Treatment for Sexually Abused Children and Adolescents. *American Psychologist*, 55 (9):1040-1049.

The Women's Policy Group (WPG) is a Georgia-based organization established in 1988 to engage in education and advocacy which benefits the lives of women, their families and their communities.

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