

Testimony in support of HB 1003
Senate Appropriations Committee
Lane Masters, Bismarck Police Department
March 5, 2021

My Name is Lane K. Masters, I work for the Bismarck Police department. I have worked for the department for over seven years, serving as a detective for four of those years. During my time as a detective, I became involved in human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation of youth cases. Prior to this I worked as a Patrolman, a field training Officer, a property crimes investigator, a financial crimes investigator, a child abuse investigator, and a violent crimes investigator.

During this time, I have interviewed embezzlers, thieves, drug dealers, murderers, and even those who would violently assault an infant. For most of the people who commit crime, their behavior stems from a weakness in character, such as addiction. A pimp, however, is a different class of criminal. Pimps are cunning and manipulative and seek out the most vulnerable of young women to enroll into this slavery. Often these women enter “the life” as children. I can say from personal experience investigating cases within the jurisdiction of Bismarck, the young girls who become trapped in “the life” are girls who have been failed by their parents, failed by society, and live a life of such despair that drugs are often their solitary means of escape. The pimp often starts as a provider of shelter and these drugs. Keeping the child off the streets and in a numbed state to manipulate them into servitude. Do not think for a second that this cannot happen to North Dakota youth. This has and continues to happen to our youth; in fact, during my time investigating within this discipline the bulk of my work has been with young runaway girls being exploited.

I was relieved to find, when I entered this field of work, that there was a small but highly skilled, motivated, and passionate team of people dedicated to combating this hideous mark on our society. You have heard from many of these people today. Human trafficking is a complicated problem, and complicated problems require multi-faceted solutions. Law Enforcement's approach to human trafficking has significantly changed over the years, having run the spectrum from arresting the victims, to recognizing them as such. Now when we identify a victim of human trafficking, this team of people approach each case, together. I often tell people that amongst this team, I am the least important person in the room, as the people who comprise this team are capable of remarkable things with the victims of human trafficking. This team, this task force, takes a truly holistic approach to the problem, with efforts emphasizing victim safety, recovery, and even helping them thrive after getting out of "the life."

With exploited youth this team works with other entities to place, protect, educate, and treat the youth in effort to give them a life better than the one they were dealt. This often takes multiple attempts, as addiction, despair, and trauma are difficult demons to slay. A grizzled old detective once told me, "We speak for those who cannot speak for themselves." I feel this way about this team, and about the work they do for youth of North Dakota. There is truly, none more needing of our effort, and none more deserving of our charity than a forsaken child.

We can no longer claim innocence by the guise of ignorance. Our state is a state in high demand for this commodity of human suffering. The same assets which make us financially strong make us morally responsible. We are a state with a reputation amongst traffickers as having this demand, due to the need for laborers in our prosperity. I have viewed multiple cell phone conversations between out of state pimps and their victims wherein the pimp discusses how easy it is to obtain clients in North Dakota. But do not be deceived, the people who patronize these

endeavors are not limited to out of state laborers. In fact, through many John stings I learned that there is no set societal nor economic category of person who would seek to purchase a human being for sexual service. Many delusion themselves with the belief that it is a transaction amongst consenting adults, however for the overwhelming majority of such women, there is a pimp not far away, profiting from modern slavery.

Amongst all the people in this room, prosecutors, Law Enforcement, judges, service providers, and you as law makers, we collectively have the power to change our state's reputation. North Dakotan's value kindness and "North Dakota nice" has long been a motto describing our citizens. "Be Legendary" is our state's brand. "Legendary" simply means remarkable enough to be famous. I would say that Theodore Roosevelt was Legendary, but also Genghis Kahn; albeit for very different reasons. All of us in this room, right now, can do something important for the front lines of a crisis which is only just recently gaining the national attention it deserves.

Right now, North Dakota has the opportunity to address this crisis. We are a state with a small enough population, a large enough wealth, and a people armed with kindness. I envision that with the right leadership, the right funding, and commitment to the cause, North Dakota could turn our reputation around from being a state in demand for trafficking, to a bastion of safety for those so trafficked. I think we all would prefer that pimps fear sending their victims to North Dakota, lest they be rescued from them, rather than profiting from our resources.

Let us today be legendary for the right reasons. Thank you.