

## Written Testimony of Ilonka Deaton

Advocate, Survivor, and Educator

Director of Advocacy Jaco Booyens Ministries  
In Support of SB 2330

March 10, 2025

Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Ilonka Deaton. I am a survivor of child sex trafficking, an advocate, an educator, and an author. From the age of 12 to 18, I was trafficked within the music industry—an industry that should have been a place of creativity and dreams but became the setting of my deepest nightmare. Today, I stand before you not only as a survivor but as a voice for the millions of children who may never have the chance to tell their stories.

I submit this testimony in **strong support of SB 2330**, a bill that will ensure our schools provide critical trafficking prevention education to students, equipping them with the tools to protect themselves from manipulation, coercion, and exploitation.

I was 12 years old when I was lured into a situation I could not escape. My trafficker was someone my family trusted—an older man who manipulated me through fear, coercion, and shame. Like so many victims, I did not have the language to understand what was happening to me, nor did I know how to ask for help. No one had ever told me that trafficking did not always involve abduction or dark alleyways. No one had warned me that traffickers could be people we trust. No one had ever educated me on my right to say no, my right to be safe, and the warning signs of manipulation and grooming.

Had I been given this education in school, my story might have been different. I might have recognized the tactics used against me. I might have known that I was not alone. I might have had the words to cry out for help.

This is why **trafficking prevention education is not optional—it is critical.**

### Why SB 2330 Must Be Passed:

- **Children Are the Target:** Traffickers prey on the vulnerable. Young people, especially those in middle and high school, are often targeted through social media, online gaming, and even through peers who have been recruited into trafficking rings. Without education, they are defenseless against these tactics.
- **Trafficking Does Not Look Like the Movies:** The reality is that most victims know their traffickers. Many are groomed over time, manipulated with gifts, promises, and threats. If students are not taught what grooming looks like, they will not recognize when it's happening to them or their friends.

- **Education Can Prevent Victimization:** Teaching children about boundaries, consent, digital safety, and the warning signs of trafficking empowers them to protect themselves. **Knowledge is a weapon that disrupts the trafficker’s playbook.**
- **Teachers and School Staff Are First Responders:** Educators see children every day. With proper training, they can recognize the behavioral and psychological indicators of trafficking. If we equip teachers with this knowledge, we turn schools into places of intervention, not just education.
- **Survivors Need to Know There Is Hope:** One of the most devastating lies traffickers tell their victims is that no one will believe them. But when a survivor hears in a classroom that there are safe adults who will help them, that lie loses its power. Trafficking education does not just prevent—it rescues.

The cost of silence is too great. Without proactive education, we allow traffickers to remain one step ahead. We allow children to be exploited in plain sight. And we fail the most vulnerable among us.

That is why **I urge you to pass SB 2330.** This bill will give students the knowledge to protect themselves, train teachers to recognize the signs of trafficking, and ensure that every child has access to the resources they need to stay safe.

If even one child is saved because of this legislation, then it is worth it. But I believe we can do more than that. I believe we can stop trafficking before it starts.

**I respectfully urge you to vote YES on SB 2330.**

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to protecting our children.

**Ilonka Deaton**

Advocate, Speaker, Author

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