

I am grateful to be speaking with you today. I had every intention of being there in person, hotel booked and car packed, unfortunately, fear and anxiety took hold an hour before I was to leave. The concern of retaliation if I expose myself publicly was debilitating. Safety and Anonymity is something that has been elusive for the past five years. Isolation at times is my only sense of security. This is and remains a massive obstacle and concern for survivors and this is why you will rarely see us speak publicly, if at all. There is nothing legally implemented at this time to keep survivors and whistleblowers protected. This issue among many other issues is what compels me to speak with you today. The desire to highlight these issues has been driving me forward even amidst my fears.

This present moment used to be unimaginable. My story as a mother and a survivor of human trafficking and systemic abuse began two years before I was brought to ND. This is my Testimony, a testimony that I feel will do better being heard here, than in any courtroom. A little over five years ago I was busy being a single mom, raising my two daughters and managing a hair salon—a life that was quite ordinary.

Living paycheck check to paycheck like many, doing my best to be and do it all as a mother, life wasn't perfect but always centered in love. I, myself, grew up in a small MN town, an uneventful but safe and quiet community. My background includes jail administration, early childhood development, transportation, beautician, management and floral design. My most favorite of these things, is being a mom. The events that I am about to relay to you changed mine and my daughters

lives five years ago, it began with a predatory landlord. I didn't see the red flags, due to societal norms and never wanting to offend or hurt others feelings, these red flags were blurred. I thought everyone that smiled at me was a kind and good person. I grew up learning to trust everyone

until they prove themselves otherwise. I was no longer in that world. I was not taught that predators will look just like you and me. I thought predators were obvious. That's what all the books and stories said. These predators take advantage of knowing this and using these societal norms and ignorance against their victims. I endured my landlords' advances, making polite excuses until I finally stood up for myself and said no. Everything changed dramatically from that point forward. He levied an eviction against me with false accusations, I fought the whole way to court with proof of the lies.

The judge never looked at my documentation, my daughters and I were evicted. I sought legal aid and was denied help each time. It all happened in weeks, not months like they say, thinking you'll have time. This opened the door for another predator to enter my life, a predator that my landlord was connected to within the same human trafficking network. If one can't get to you they will send another one to try. Amidst this chaos unfolding this predator came in the form of a boyfriend, the hero, love bombing me and my life, offering shelter.

This was no hero; this was just the beginning of events that would unfold in my life like a Hollywood movie. Little did I know this man was tasked to groom me, methodically and secretly drugging me, evaluating me and gathering information on me, for a much darker and deeper network. Using psychological warfare to instill in me "trigger" words to illicit a desired response in the victim, this can be a verbal cue, or a symbol. Always watching me through cameras, neighbors, and others in the network, I was kept on a tight leash. My world growing ever smaller, stranger and scarier.

I began noticing small things, I slowly and methodically began uncovering and documenting what had been happening and being done to me. When I escaped my groomer I was still ignorant, I had escaped him but I had not escaped the network. What I can only describe as the car ride from hell.

the day I fled with my daughters. Knowing I had a very narrow window to do so. This event Engrained in our memories like a nightmare. My story is a well-documented one, showing a timeline of events documented by the human trafficking network hotline, FBI, numerous law enforcement agencies, several shelters, Advocates, hospitals, various state funded entities and therapists. Spanning WI, MN, ND and CO. Some of these professionals being eyewitness to nefarious and perplexing events surrounding me firsthand. Having accumulated knowledge and documentation as proof of what was happening to me and others, and how it was being done, was both revealing and distressing. As I uncovered more and more during my journey to find help, I found myself in an increasingly vulnerable state.

After sending my daughters to safety. I was initiated into a two-year journey of homelessness, where staying alive was a daily activity by outrunning and outsmarting the network. I continually reached out for help, contacting over 600 foundations, law enforcement agencies, various entities tasked with DV and HT services, overturning any stone I found, yet I was mostly left to fend for myself. I was relentlessly pursued for over a year with threat of felony charges for fleeing with my daughters in my groomer's extra car, the same car I turned over to police the same day we fled, the county I fled filing charges of theft while the car was already in police custody. A car he bought for \$250.00 for me to use when my only car mysteriously disappeared from my driveway shortly before I was evicted. Being shuffled around city to city, on foot, by buses, train, planes and strangers' cars around from state to state like an orphan that no one wanted to deal with. Being illegally held in psychiatric holds after calling 911 for help, not because I was threatening to harm myself or others, but because I was speaking of things that were not to be spoken of. Sedating me even though I was calm, restraining my wrists and ankles. Waking two days later, dazed and confused, papers being

shoved in my face to sign, my clothes handed to me in a rush, they couldn't get me out the front door fast enough, out to the street with no guidance or information for help. No empathy, no compassion. Hungry and afraid. My mind and heart screaming from the inside, I am someone's daughter, someone's mother, am I not worthy? Back on the street to play the game of survival again. Endless days of walking, go here, go there, maybe the next place can help, the next one, the next one. Could sure use a cup of hot coffee, walking, walking, walking. Need food, I'm being followed, I'm tired, I'm hungry, I miss my babies, I'm cold. These thoughts echoing daily in my head. How can I be among thousands of people every day and no one sees me? I need help, someone please help. Applying and reapplying for services, a maddeningly repetitive process that makes you question reality. Every new place has more of the same paperwork, more telling of my story, more let downs. Feeling as if it was ground hogs day every day. Chasing my tail, round and round the system i go. Many shelters I wouldn't have left my dog at, unsafe, drugs and traffickers operating openly as if they ran the shelters themselves. Some were a bit safer and slightly better the further away from the larger cities which is to be expected but this was where I saw and experienced more subtle and quiet abuses from within some of these shelters and systems and people that worked at them, it was harder to detect but nonetheless an effective form of abuse. Seeing and experiencing coercion through various tactics, misuse of power, authority, funds and donations, also withholding services and basic human needs. shelter exploiting survivors in various ways. Feeding women and children food that had been expired for two years, I was kicked out of a shelter for raising concerns about these issues to staff. Some just blatant lack of concern and unwillingness to help. Some advocates seemingly there only in case 911 needed calling and to collect a paycheck. I watched a

disabled diabetic elder woman go unchecked for almost 24 hours. In her bed unconscious, I called 911. I did find some that really did care, quietly, never openly, I also saw the underbelly of this world. In one shelter I was attacked, laying on the cement patio of the shelter with a head wound, blood coming from the gash on my head from when my skull met the pavement. Taken by ambulance to the emergency room barely conscious, staples to stitch me up. When asked by the doctor what happened, I said it was because I have low blood pressure and passed out. He knew I was lying, I feared retaliation. I made it back to the shelter, in a haze with a possible concussion, I stuffed a few things in a bag and left. Not one person from the shelter that I had spent the last four months called me to see what happened, take a report or see if I was okay. Open and vulnerable again, back to the streets. Some shelters felt like trap houses themselves, housing vulnerable women with men with only a flimsy door between you and them, these men openly making comments and advances, women they know are broken and afraid to say no. Back to the street. At the overnight shelters, I've seen Grown men wandering into the women's area while we were sleeping, the man, in only a shirt and underwear. The guard stationed at the women's door completely unconcerned while he flirts with homeless women. More predators. Back to the street. Staying sporadically in hotels, hotels some shelters would acquire for me when I was awaiting transport to their shelter, rarely vetting the accommodations, leaving myself and many others, some with children in hotels known for drugs and trafficking. The transportation process is incredibly unsafe and chaotic, many never make their destination due to being unaccompanied and out in the open when they are vulnerable to predators. Sitting for hours or even days at train and bus stations waiting to be shipped off. No money, no food, hoping to make it a little longer until you get to the next place to eat and sleep. Begging God that this next shelter, please, let this shelter be the one where I finally get help. I can tell my story, like many survivors,

most often on auto-pilot due to having to recount it with every new person and service I encountered, quite literally thousands of times. every new county, every new city, every new worker, more of the same. Some pushing me straight to finding employment, thinking to myself, 'are you hearing me? I'm running from traffickers, I am a woman whose life just blew up.' No one was really listening, just follow what they were programmed to do. I didn't need more administering to, regurgitating the same procedures from the same book, I needed someone to listen to me outside the box of the system. I needed someone to say, you're safe and if we don't have all the answers, we will help you through it. Names and faces were the only difference in every new town. What I am sharing with you all now, are parts of my story rarely heard. It was two years of feeling like a rabbit chasing a carrot on a stick. I became malnourished, These kinds of places and entities prey on the vulnerable and put a strain on communities, creating damaging affects to people already broken and keep funding away from reputable ones. I was lured like many, to different counties, even other states with the promise of help, only to realize it was another lie and dead end. I wasn't hiding, I hadn't given up, I was fighting every day for help. During these two years before arriving in ND, I saw and endured heinous acts committed against myself and others. Even amidst the horrors, I knew, I was lucky compared to what others have endured and still do—crimes committed by predators from every walk of life and even from the systems that were allegedly designed to help and protect. crimes being committed against vulnerable people. There are supposed laws against that.

Being thrust into a world filled with injustices, addictions, and suffering—a reality that felt like a foreign language. It was complex and overwhelming, rife with inequities that even seasoned professionals struggle to navigate. I was seen as valuable to this predatory network due to my

vulnerabilities: little to no family support, no previous criminal or mental health history and a demeanor being kind, nice, and seemingly naive. I appeared programmable to them. They thought no one would notice much if I disappeared. A network of predators linked together to exploit others. When you become a target of this network, you're no longer just facing an individual but an entire system of organized entities. Swirling you around within their systems, illusion of being free from their grasp, placing people around you and in your life. Every time they attempted to silence my voice; I would speak louder. I was punished when I did, anytime I fought back, I was punished in some way, financially, psychologically, physically, even with threat to loved ones, their reach into your life is cruelly invasive and pervasive. These are only a small fraction of insights into this predatory world, a fraction of what I and many others have and continue to endure, finding it difficult at times myself, to comprehend the vastness and connectivity of this picture as a whole and I lived it. Limiting over reach of law impedes law enforcement in their fight against human trafficking, along with just the sheer complexities of these cases, they lack funding for manpower and other necessary tools to combat trafficking. Then you enter into a nightmare of jurisdictional maps with inconsistent laws across cities, counties, states and federal jurisdiction tying everyone's hands.

Scattered stories as survivors run from town to town, leaving law enforcement with more questions than answers on how to help.

Those two years of my life felt like a game of survival. It all changed in July of 2021 when I called a sheriff's department for help. It was my Hail Mary moment. I was broken and twisted, a shell of my former healthy, bright, and optimistic self. The echoes lingering of being ridiculed, mocked, and shamed. Labeling me as a liar, crazy, an unsuitable mother and an addict.

He asked me a few questions, made a call and within hours, I arrived safely in a ND shelter.

I weighed less than 100 pounds—terrified, lost, and alone after two years of seeking help with

little success. All I wanted was to stop running. Reunite with my daughters, find safe shelter, and access warm, healthy food and a chance to pick up the pieces of a shattered life. The shelter in ND helped me begin that process and did so for over 3 years. After losing everything, my family, friends, belongings and being on the run for two years, this shelter felt like it was the Light in the Dark.

This was when my real battle began, the battle to save myself, my family, my life, my soul.

This ND shelter and my community have helped me to achieve some of these goals.

After stabilizing my housing, I began unraveling a monumental and complex puzzle of trauma, at times the shelter and advocates learning alongside me. I began unwrapping and walking myself through a complex labyrinth of healing.

For instance, someone like myself, that is a citizen with only an expired DL and no other documents, due to state and federal laws made it an almost two-year ordeal to acquire proper ID and birth certificate. The hurdles of dealing with a lack of laws to help secure anonymity to keep survivors safe outside of shelter.

I consider myself one of the fortunate ones; I had a life before abuse that while not perfect, provided a solid foundation, which I believe helped in a quicker capacity in my healing. It also contributed to helping me navigate through a daunting world of corruption, systemic injustices, and human trafficking not only at the hands of my perpetrators but also from a system that is woefully inadequate to address such complex circumstances.

The future:

I do see changes being made—people from all walks of life coming together, connecting. This collaborative spirit is evident in our shared efforts to tackle the complex challenges we face. I believe ND has the potential to be a model for communities and states nationwide, showcasing innovative solutions to end poverty, addiction, homelessness, abuse and



human trafficking. It's crucial that we also educate and engage with our communities as a whole. Their involvement fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose within communities. It's essential to recognize that wraparound services are often necessary for many individuals. One person frequently requires a team to help rebuild their life. However, we still encounter gaps within these services. The issue isn't that people don't want to help; it's that many are unaware of the problems that exist. When others are enlightened about the many challenges we face, they are often motivated to take action. I encourage everyone to ask questions—this is how we effectively find understanding and develop solutions to the issues at hand. Additionally, there is an unbalanced power dynamic that exists in government services meant to help those in need. It's crucial that we address this imbalance and ensure that those who have lived these experiences have a voice at the table, helping shape our future. By documenting successes and challenges, this helps provide valuable insights and resources for others looking to replicate this model.

In addition, focusing on holistic support systems ensures that we are not just addressing immediate needs but also investing in long-term solutions. By prioritizing mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, we empower individuals to break free from cycles, fostering resilience within our communities. Together, we can cultivate an ecosystem that nurtures growth, healing, and opportunity. As I share my story, I invite others to learn from my experiences, in hopes of sparking a nationwide movement toward sustainable change.

While my story reflects a more positive outcome, there are still many hurdles I have to overcome. Work must continue to end abuse and vulnerabilities by reworking outdated policies that impede progress. We must prioritize giving seats at the table to those with real lived experience.

It's essential that the voices of individuals who have faced the challenges we aim to address are included in the decision-making process. Decisions made in meetings about people like myself should genuinely reflect the experiences and needs of those affected. By involving survivors and individuals with lived experience, we ensure that policies and programs are not only relevant but also, effective.

Additionally, we must address the broader issues of financial stability, which remain a significant barrier for many. Jobs are often an unrealistic prospect for many emerging from domestic violence, human trafficking, addiction, and homelessness. Without access to comprehensive support services that ensure a solid foundation and time to heal—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually—individuals are at risk of falling back into these destructive cycles.

To break this cycle, it's essential to address the fundamental vulnerabilities that many face.

Access to stable housing, reliable transportation, nutritious food, and basic human needs is critical.

Only by removing these barriers can individuals truly begin their healing journey. When people feel secure in their environment, they can focus on rebuilding their lives, pursuing education and job opportunities and ultimately contributing positively to the community. We need to stop putting the cart before the horse and meet people where they are at. There's no one size fits all when it comes to needs and healing.

Dreams and personal goals often feel elusive, and it's vital that we create pathways for those willing to invest in us—not just within the regular parameters of existing systems but by valuing our ideas and contributions. Many individuals like myself have innovative thoughts and strategies that could enhance many initiatives. By integrating these perspectives, we can foster a more inclusive and effective approach to creating real change.

Moreover, we must advocate for a more holistic approach to those seeking it, healing that encompasses spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health. I chose the holistic path to my own care, often times difficult to obtain due to no systematic or financial support. These elements are intricately connected and play a vital role in recovery. When we address only one aspect of well-being, we risk leaving individuals with incomplete support. True healing occurs when we consider the whole person.

For many, spirituality provides a sense of purpose and connection that is essential for emotional resilience. Mental health services must be complemented by emotional support and spiritual guidance to create a safe environment for individuals to thrive. Similarly, physical health interventions, such as proper nutrition and exercise, are foundational for restoring overall well-being.

When those who have lived and navigated the complex issues of domestic violence, human trafficking, homelessness, and addiction are included in discussions, we can create solutions that resonate deeply with the needs of others. These tables need our voices—our insights, our stories, and our perspectives—because we understand the nuances of these challenges in a way that others cannot.

By fostering an inclusive environment that values experiences and advocates for holistic health approaches, we can drive meaningful change. Together, we can develop strategies that lead to real and lasting solutions.

Creating an environment where every voice matters, every story counts, and where the journey of recovery addresses the full spectrum of human experience.

Funding should be a priority for those with proven track records and innovative ideas, ensuring that we provide the necessary support to those in need effectively and sustainably. When resources are allocated to organizations and initiatives with demonstrated success, we can be confident that our investments are making a tangible difference in the lives of individuals and families.

Traditional approaches may not suffice in a rapidly changing landscape, and fresh perspectives can lead to groundbreaking solutions. By funding organizations that prioritize innovation, we can encourage the development of new strategies that tackle issues like domestic violence, human trafficking and systemic abuse more effectively. Investing in proven and innovative organizations, enhances the support available to those in need and fosters a culture of accountability and excellence. It creates a competitive environment where organizations strive to improve their services, ultimately benefiting individuals and communities as a whole.

In conclusion, these needs are crucial to recovery and reintegration into society. To elaborate on what is needed moving forward:

1. **Stabilized Housing:** Safe and stable housing options are foundational for survivors. They need a secure place to live where they can heal and feel protected from potential traffickers or danger.
2. **Food and Security:** Access to nutritious food and basic necessities is crucial for their physical well-being. Ensuring that survivors are not only fed but also feel secure in their environment is an essential aspect of recovery.
3. **Aftercare Needs:** Comprehensive aftercare services help survivors regain a sense of normalcy. This can include emotional support, case management, and assistance with rebuilding their lives.

4. **Financial Needs:** Survivors often lack financial independence due to the exploitation they endured. Access to financial resources, including assistance and other means of support, is vital for their empowerment.
5. **Protective Services:** Survivors may face threats from their traffickers or others. Protective services, such as relocation assistance or a change of identity , can be essential in keeping them safe.
6. **Streamlined Services:** Survivors often have to navigate a complex web of systems (healthcare, legal, social services, etc.). Streamlining these services and making them more accessible can ease their journey to recovery.
7. **Anonymity:** Many survivors fear retaliation from traffickers or others connected to their exploitation. Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in services is necessary for their safety and peace of mind.
8. **Transportation Issues:** Access to transportation is often a barrier for survivors who may need it for appointments or other essential needs. Providing assistance with transportation can help overcome this challenge. Standing at a bus stop leaves a survivor open and vulnerable.
9. **Legal Issues:** Survivors often have legal issues, such as criminal charges related to their trafficking experience or child custody issues. Legal support is critical in helping them navigate these complexities.
10. **Legal Documents:** Many survivors may have had their personal documents confiscated or lost during trafficking. Assistance in obtaining and safeguarding legal documents is an essential step for regaining their identity and securing their future.
11. **Mental Health Care:** All of the above issues are directly linked to a survivor's Mental Health. Addressing the trauma caused by human trafficking is essential for long-term recovery. Access to mental health care, including therapy and counseling, helps survivors process their experiences and rebuild their mental well-being but without addressing and solving the above stated issues a survivor will generally continue to suffer with mental health issues.

I speak not only from personal experience but also from extensive research on effective solutions to these ongoing issues. Through continued conversations, collaboration, and informed action, we can provide survivors with the necessary tools and resources to rebuild their lives with dignity and security.

I invite all of you here today to reach out to me and engage in further dialogue, and help create real, sustainable change for those who have suffered unimaginable trauma. Together, we can ensure that no survivor is left behind, and that each has the opportunity to heal, regain independence, and thrive.

I would like to ask everyone listening to take a moment and imagine yourself in another's shoes and in that moment, I hope you see that life is often far more complex and vibrant than we imagine. The world truly comes alive when we embrace new perspectives. We discover truth standing in others shoes, and while it may not always be the truth we desire to confront, it remains essential. We need truth to rise to the surface, loud and unyielding, echoing the screams of voices silenced or stifled. The experiences—both good and bad—have not only challenged me but have also strengthened me. Each trial and tribulation has contributed to my growth, layer by layer, shaping me into the woman and mother I am today. It's through this journey that I've learned resilience, compassion, and the importance of understanding others and myself. While I still face challenges and obstacles that are daunting and in need of immediate resolution, my hope is that my words here today echo through the halls of the capitol and the hearts of those that can do something about it.