

Testimony of Ilonka Deaton Before the Judiciary Committee

Chairperson, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ilonka Deaton, and I am here not only as an expert advocate in human trafficking policy but as someone who survived six years of sex trafficking in the music industry. I was just a child when a trusted adult, someone I should have been able to rely on, exploited me and took control of my life. For six long years, I lived in silence, trapped in fear, believing there was no way out.

One of the most insidious factors in my story was the role that early exposure to pornography played—not just in how I was groomed, but in how my abuser justified my exploitation. I was introduced to things no child should ever see, let alone experience. This exposure rewired my sense of normal, blurred the lines between abuse and love, and kept me locked in a cycle of shame and silence. It cost me years—not just of my childhood but of my recovery. Even now, the financial burden of trauma therapy remains a cost I continue to carry, a burden that no survivor should have to bear alone.

But what haunts me most is this: if I had been given real education—age-appropriate, truth-centered education—about exploitation, consent, and where to turn for help, I might not have remained trapped for six years. If someone had come into my classroom and told me what trafficking looks like, what grooming sounds like, and that what was happening to me was not my fault, I might have found the courage to speak out sooner. Instead, I remained in the shadows, unseen, unheard, and unrescued.

This is why I stand before you today, pleading for change. We must ensure that children are not left in the dark as I was. We must fight to protect them from the exposure that primes them for victimization and equip them with the knowledge that can save their lives. And we must remove the barriers to healing for those who have already suffered, because no survivor should have to fight for the right to recover.

The choices we make today will determine how many more children remain trapped, and how many more survivors struggle alone. I urge you—choose to protect them. Choose to act. Choose to be the voice they may not yet have.

Thank you,
Ilonka Deaton
Survivor
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