

Chairperson, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jaco Booyens, and I come before you not only as the head of JBM, where I have spent over 25 years fighting human trafficking, but also as a family member of a survivor. My sister was trafficked for six long years—years stolen from her childhood, years that can never be given back. I have seen firsthand the devastation that trafficking inflicts—not just on the victims, but on their families. The pain does not end when the trafficking does; it lingers, it reshapes lives, and it demands a lifetime of healing.

One of the most tragic realities I have come to understand in this fight is how preventable so much of this suffering could be. My sister, like too many children, was failed in multiple ways—failed by a system that did not educate her on what trafficking looks like, failed by a society that normalizes the very grooming tactics traffickers use, and failed by the unchecked exposure to pornography that distorts a child’s understanding of boundaries and consent. These failures kept her in silence, and they cost her years of freedom, while my family was left unaware, powerless to intervene.

This is why education in schools is critical. If we do not provide children with the education they need to recognize the signs of trafficking, to understand how predators operate, and to know where to seek help, we are leaving them vulnerable. We must arm them with knowledge that can save their lives. Prevention starts with education, and right now, we are failing to give them the tools they need to protect themselves.

But prevention is only part of the fight. The high cost of recovery for survivors is another battle we cannot ignore. Trafficking steals years from its victims, and the financial burden of trauma therapy, medical care, and rehabilitation often prevents them from fully healing. My sister and countless others like her have had to fight not just for their freedom, but for the resources they need to rebuild their lives. No survivor should have to struggle to afford recovery from a crime they never chose.

This is not just a policy issue—it is a human issue. The decisions made in this room will determine whether we continue to allow traffickers to operate in the shadows or whether we stand up, draw a hard line, and say, “Not on our watch.” If we do not act, more children will suffer. More families will grieve. More survivors will carry the weight of trauma that could have been prevented.

I urge you to take bold action. Protect our children from the dangers that are stealing their innocence. Implement policies that ensure education in schools so that children are empowered before they become victims. Provide the necessary support so that survivors can access the healing they deserve. And stand with survivors and their families, not just in words but in laws that ensure no child is left to fight this battle alone.