

To: **Chairman Beard, Vice Chairman Lemm** and distinguished members of the Senate Education Committee.

From: **Lowell Hochhalter**, Co-Founder/CEO of The LifeGuard Group, and anti trafficking organization based in Missoula Montana.  
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Re: **SB2330** - Relating to mandatory human trafficking and exploitation prevention and awareness education for students and faculty at public schools and public institutions of higher education; to provide for a report; and to provide an appropriation.

An outline of my testimony ***IN FAVOR*** of SB2330, that I will present, in person, February 5, 2025

In front of this committee is a Bill that carries with it the potential to alter the lives of generations that come after us. Human Trafficking is not a new problem. For far too long, we as Americans, have ignored the red flags of sexual exploitation of children, and adults. We have turned a blind eye to the trafficking of individuals for domestic servitude, debt bondage, and slavery. And we have shrugged off the responsibility of aggressively protecting our children.

Educating students about human trafficking in middle and high school is essential. Knowledge empowers students to recognize the signs, understand the risks, and make informed decisions about their safety. Adolescents are at a critical age when they begin navigating more independent environments—both online and offline—and may become vulnerable to predators. By raising awareness early, schools can provide students with the knowledge and resources they need to protect themselves and others from exploitation. Furthermore, this education fosters empathy, helping students understand the global and local impact of human trafficking while encouraging a sense of social responsibility.

Early education equips students with the tools to proactively prevent trafficking and advocate for victims, contributing to safer communities and a more informed generation.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the average age of an individual recruited into sex trafficking is between 12 and 14 years old.

95% of victims encountered Law Enforcement during their time of exploitation. 89% were involved with a healthcare professional while being trafficked. Almost 70% of trafficking victims have stated that they came in contact with an educator during their time of exploitation.

Since 2010 we have been providing school assembly presentations to middle schools, junior high schools and high schools. In 100% of schools we have had a(n) individual(s) present us with lived experience of human trafficking. In 2013, 2014, and again in 2015, our team visited schools across our great state. In April 2014, we embarked on what we called "The Bakken Tour." exited the gymnasium. It was not uncommon for students to come to our presenters, especially the woman who spoke as a survivor.

Briefly share our experience in Williston with 11 year old girl.

It was Mahatma Ghandi who said "A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable." Kids are vulnerable, simply because they are kids. I urge this committee to send this Bill forward with a resounding affirmation for approval. Thank you for your the opportunity to be in front of you today.