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Media Advisory For:
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Contact: Taryn Mastrean
602-818-3955

WA Senate Passes New Bill to Fight Child Sex Trafficking

SB 6251 Increases Online Accountability to Deter Commercial Sexual Abuse of Minors

Vancouver, WA –The Washington state Senate unanimously passed a raft of Protected Innocence bills targeted at tightening the state laws against child sex trafficking, including the pioneering SB 6251, aimed at stopping the online facilitation of child sex trafficking. The bill sponsored by Seattle Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles (D-WA) establishes a new crime of advertising commercial sexual abuse of a minor in Washington. Senator Kohl-Welles' bill is a part of a series of eight bipartisan bills to combat human trafficking that passed in the Senate yesterday and are headed to the House of Representatives for approval.

Shared Hope International is a leader in the national initiative to bring greater accountability to online facilitators by rallying 17 activist organizations to call on over 60 mayors to encourage Village Voice Media to stop illegal forms of commercial sex advertisements on its website Backpage.com, the online classified giant. We have challenged mayors in every city where Village Voice media is operating to publically hold one of the nation's leading source of online sex escort ads accountable to ensure that children are not sold for sex through Backpage.com.

“Backpage.com executives are hiding behind the protection of the Federal Communications Decency Act, claiming no responsibility for the hundreds of documented children that have been sold for sex on their site,” said Shared Hope International President and Founder Linda Smith and former U.S. Congresswoman. “Shared Hope International’s Protected Innocence Challenge reinforces the importance of state laws in reaching this facilitator of child sex trafficking. We will not continue to allow this grave omission to cause injustice for America’s children and we are in full support of Washington’s national leadership on this issue.”

Last year, Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn requested Village Voice Media, owner of online classified site Backpage.com, take a stronger, more transparent action to protect women and children from being exploited through advertisements on their website. Shared Hope International’s mayor’s campaign was initiated to encourage others to follow Mayor McGinn’s leadership on this issue. According to an independent study by Advanced Interactive Media Group, Backpage.com’s adult services section is expected to earn Village Voice Media \$24.8 million, accounting for over two thirds of the \$36 million in revenue projected to be earned by all tracked online classified sites facilitating commercial sex. Despite pressure from religious groups, advocates, and state officials, Backpage.com is not responding with solutions.

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MEDIA MATERIALS

To access Washington's Protected Innocence Report Card that grades the state on its level of protection against domestic minor sex trafficking, please visit: www.sharedhope.org/reportcards.aspx

A variety of video clips and resources, including survivor comments, are available at this location: www.sharedhope.org/media/piimediadownloads.aspx

ABOUT SHARED HOPE INTERNATIONAL: Shared Hope International was founded in 1998, by former U.S. Congresswoman Linda Smith, and exists to rescue and restore women and children in crisis. We are leaders in a worldwide effort to prevent and eradicate sex trafficking and slavery using a three-pronged strategy: prevent, rescue & restore, and bring justice. For more information about Shared Hope International, and the Protected Innocence Challenge, go to www.sharedhope.org

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