

Area of Law	Protective Provisions for the Child Victims
The Policy Point	Prostitution laws apply only to adults, making minors under 18 specifically immune from this offense.
The Legislative Solution	State human trafficking laws serve the purpose of making the actions of traffickers, buyers and facilitators criminal while protecting the victims. Therefore, it is counterproductive and confusing to retain state statutes that permit prostituted children—trafficking victims—to also be charged and prosecuted for prostitution. Criminal prostitution statutes should be amended to remove any criminal responsibility from child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Domestic minor sex trafficking victims and prostituted children are the same persons and, as such, they should consistently be treated as victims under every state law.

Select Statute Highlights

The following state laws remove a prostituted child from criminal liability under the prostitution law completely or in part.

Connecticut

Connecticut’s statute eliminates the possibility of a sexually exploited minor under 16 being charged with the crime of prostitution. It also presumes 16–17 year olds who may have otherwise been arrested and charged with prostitution are actually victims of trafficking. Specifically, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53a-82 (Prostitution: Class A misdemeanor) states, “(a) A person sixteen years of age or older is guilty of prostitution when such person engages or agrees or offers to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee, (b) In any prosecution for an offense under this section [Prostitution: Class A misdemeanor], it shall be an affirmative defense that the actor was a victim of conduct by another person that constitutes (1) a violation of section 53a-192a [Trafficking in persons], as amended by this act, or (2) a criminal violation of 18 U.S.C. Chapter 77 [Peonage, slavery, and trafficking in persons], as amended from time to time. (c) In any prosecution of a person sixteen or seventeen years of age for an offense under this section, there shall be a presumption that the actor was a victim of conduct by another person that constitutes (1) a violation of section 53a-192a [Trafficking in persons], as amended by this act, or (2) a criminal violation of 18 U.S.C. Chapter 77 [Peonage, slavery, and trafficking in persons], as amended from time to time..”

Illinois

Illinois law immunizes from prostitution charges any person under the age of 18. Pursuant to 720 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/11-14(d) (Prostitution) “if it is determined, after a reasonable detention for investigative purposes, that a person suspected of or charged with a violation of this Section is a person under the age of 18, that person shall be immune from prosecution for a prostitution offense under this Section, and shall be subject to the temporary protective custody provisions of Sections 2-5 and 2-6 of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 [705 ILCS 405/2-5 and 705 ILCS 405/2-6]. Pursuant to the provisions of Section 2-6 of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 [705 ILCS 405/2-6], a law enforcement officer who takes a person under 18 years of age into custody under this Section shall immediately report an allegation of a violation of Section 10-9 of this Code [720 ILCS 5/10-9] to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services State Central Register, which shall commence an initial investigation into child abuse or child neglect within 24 hours pursuant to Section 7.4 of the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act [325 ILCS 5/7.4 et seq.]. Furthermore, 720 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/11-14.3(a)(2)(C) (Promoting prostitution) also clarifies that an offense for profiting from prostitution by “any means . . . including from a person who patronizes a prostitute . . . does not apply to a person engaged in prostitution who is under 18 years of age. A person cannot be convicted of promoting prostitution under this paragraph (C) if the practice of prostitution underlying the offense consists exclusively of the accused’s own acts of prostitution under Section 11-14 of this Code [720 ILCS 5/11-14 [Prostitution]].”

Kentucky

Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 529.120 (Treatment of minor suspected of prostitution offense) provides that “(1) Notwithstanding KRS 529.020 [Prostitution] or 529.080 [Loitering for prostitution purposes], if it is determined after a reasonable period of custody for investigative purposes, that the person suspected of prostitution or loitering for prostitution is under the age of eighteen (18), then the minor shall not be prosecuted for an offense under KRS 529.020 or 529.080. (2) A law enforcement officer who takes a minor into custody under subsection (1) of this section shall immediately make a report to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services pursuant to KRS 620.030 [Duty to report dependency, neglect, abuse, or human trafficking]. Pursuant to KRS 620.040 [Duties of prosecutor, police, and cabinet], the officer may take the minor into protective custody. (3) The Cabinet for Health and Family Services shall commence an investigation into child dependency, neglect, or abuse pursuant to KRS 620.029 [Duties of cabinet relating to children who are victims of human trafficking].”

Minnesota

As of August 1, 2014, a child whose conduct would violate Minn. Stat. Ann. § 609.324, subd. 2, 3 (Patrons; Prostitutes; Housing Individuals engaged in prostitution; Penalties) or § 609.3243 (Loitering with intent to participate in prostitution) if the child were an adult cannot be considered a delinquent child. “Delinquent child” is expressly defined to “not include a child alleged to have engaged in conduct which would, if committed by an adult, violate any federal, state, or local law relating to being hired, offering to be hired, or agreeing to be hired by another individual to engage in sexual penetration or sexual conduct.” Minn. Stat. Ann. § 260B.007, subd. 6(c). As of August 1, 2014, Minn. Stat. Ann. § 260B.007, subd. 16(d) (Juvenile petty offender; juvenile petty offense), also clarifies that a “juvenile petty offense” will not include: “a child alleged to have violated any law relating to being hired, offering to be hired, or agreeing to be hired by another individual to engage in sexual penetration or sexual conduct which, if committed by an adult, would be a misdemeanor.” These provisions effectively make it impossible for minors to be treated as delinquent children for engaging in commercial sex acts. Instead, pursuant to Minn. Stat. Ann. § 260C.007, subd. 6(17), commercially sexually exploited minors can be treated as a child in need of protection or services which will be defined to include “sexually exploited youth” as of August 1, 2014.

Mississippi

Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-49(4) (Prostitution) provides that “[i]f it is determined that a person suspected of or charged with engaging in prostitution is engaging in those acts as a direct result of being a trafficked person, as defined by Section 97-3-54.4, that person shall be immune from prosecution for prostitution as a juvenile or adult and, if a minor, the provisions of Section 97-3-54.1(4) shall be applicable.” Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(p) (Human Trafficking Act; definitions), ‘[t]rafficked person’ means a person subjected to the practices prohibited by this act regardless of whether a perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted, and is a term used interchangeably with the terms ‘victim,’ ‘victim of trafficking’ and ‘trafficking victim.’” Since anyone who “causes or attempts to cause a minor to engage in commercial sexual activity . . .” commits an offense under § 97-3-54.1(1)(c) (Human Trafficking Act; prohibited conduct; penalty), any minor who engages in prostitution would qualify as a victim of trafficking and immunity under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-49(4).

New York

N.Y. Fam. Ct. Act § 311.4(3) (Substitution of petition or finding) states, “In any proceeding under this article [Juvenile delinquency] based upon an arrest for an act of prostitution, there is a presumption that the respondent meets the criteria as a victim of a severe form of trafficking as defined in section 7105 of title 22 of the United States Code (Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000). Upon the motion of the respondent, without the consent of the presentment agency, a petition alleging that the respondent is in need of supervision shall be substituted for the delinquency petition. If, however, the respondent has been previously adjudicated as a juvenile delinquent under this article for an act which would be a crime pursuant to article two hundred thirty [Prostitution offenses] of the penal law, if the respondent was an adult, or expresses a current unwillingness to cooperate with specialized services for sexually exploited youth, continuing with the delinquency proceeding shall be within the court’s discretion. . . .”

North Carolina

N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-204(c) (Prostitution) states that “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this section, if it is determined, after a reasonable detention for investigative purposes, that a person suspected of or charged with a violation of this section is a minor, that person shall be immune from prosecution under this section and instead shall be taken into temporary protective custody as an undisciplined juvenile pursuant to Article 19 of Chapter 7B of the General Statutes.

Pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 7B-301 [Duty to report abuse, neglect, dependency, or death due to maltreatment], a law enforcement officer who takes a minor into custody under this section shall immediately report an allegation of a violation of G.S. 14-43.11 [Human Trafficking] and G.S. 14-43.13 [Sexual servitude] to the director of the department of social services in the county where the minor resides or is found, as appropriate, which shall commence an initial investigation into child abuse or child neglect within 24 hours pursuant to G.S. 7B-301 [Duty to report abuse, neglect, dependency, or death due to maltreatment], and G.S. 7B-302 [Assessment by director].”

Tennessee

Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-513(d) states, “[n]otwithstanding any provision of this section to the contrary, if it is determined after a reasonable detention for investigative purposes, that a person suspected of or charged with a violation of this section is under eighteen (18) years of age, that person shall be immune from prosecution for prostitution as a juvenile or adult. A law enforcement officer who takes a person under eighteen (18) years of age into custody for a suspected violation of this section shall, upon determination that the person is a minor, provide the minor with the telephone number for the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline and release the minor to the custody of a parent or legal guardian.”