

PRESS RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA WORKS TO CLOSE LEGAL GAPS TO FIGHT CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

WASHINGTON, D.C., Every state now has a law against sex trafficking and most state laws include penalties for buying sex with a minor, according to an [annual State Report Card](#) released by [Shared Hope International](#) (SHI), the only U.S. NGO working in every state to end child sex trafficking through legal reform.

This year, California is also home to this year's SHI **Pathbreaker Awardee Michelle Guymon, MSW**, Director of the Child Trafficking Unit, Los Angeles County Probation Department.

Shared Hope established the Pathbreaker award to recognize the pioneering efforts of those who broke the trend of inaction and initiated proactive responses to prevent sex trafficking, and this year recognizes the leadership of Michelle Guymon. Michelle particularly prioritizes survivor leadership in her work, and has led the development of an innovative yearly conference created by young survivors for young survivors.

Michelle Guymon is Director of the nation's first probation department with a unit specifically devoted to addressing the physical, mental and emotional needs of commercially sexually exploited youth. Michelle has been instrumental in the creation and implementation of the Los Angeles County's Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children for which she serves as the project manager. This nationally recognized protocol which was launched in August 2014 places a priority on treating trafficked children as victims rather than criminals.

"We honor the bold leadership of Michelle Guymon, and we are encouraged to see California legislators working to protect children from trafficking," said SHI founder Linda Smith.

SHI started the annual report card—known as the Protected Innocence Challenge—six years ago, in 2011. That year, 26 states got Fs and 15 had Ds. This year, **California**, along with states across the nation, **enacted important laws**:

- From 2011 to 2016 California's Protected Innocence Challenge grade has gone up from an F to a D.
- The human trafficking law protects victims of child sex trafficking without requiring proof of force, fraud or coercion.
- On September 26, 2016, California passed HB 1322, critical legislation ensuring that children can no longer be charged with prostitution. Since this legislation was enacted following the production of SHI's 2016 report card and analysis report, HB 1322 will be reflected in SHI's 2017 report card and report.
- California provides comprehensive victim-friendly trial procedures and protections, including the availability of closed circuit testimony for some child victims and child-friendly courtroom environments.

Despite so much progress, SHI research **found critical gaps** in these areas of **California** law:

- California law provides minimal penalties for prosecuting demand for sex with minors.
- Paying for sex acts with a minor and benefitting financially from assisting or enabling sex trafficking are not punishable under the human trafficking law.

[Shared Hope International](#) is an anti-trafficking organization focusing on prevention, restoration and justice for victims of sex trafficking. Founded in 1998 by Congresswoman Linda Smith, Shared Hope is a trusted leader for training, research, restorative development, and legislative development.

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MEDIA MATERIALS:

For media convenience, a variety of resources are available at www.sharedhope.org/press. Video clips, including sex trafficking survivor comments, are available at this location: <https://vimeo.com/user12564384/videos>. Videos are password protected, please enter password sharedmedia1 to access media clips.