



“Stop Criminalizing Kids for Crimes Committed Against Them!”

Despite Sex Trafficking Laws, Children in Georgia Can be Charged with Prostitution

WASHINGTON, D.C., Consistently working to strengthen state child sex trafficking laws, Georgia has made notable legislative progress in criminalizing the buying and selling of sex with children. Acknowledging the need to respond to domestic minor sex trafficking through strong state law, Georgia has earned a “B” grade, 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. Despite such efforts, Georgia law still allows for the prosecution of children engaged in commercial sex, providing a punitive, rather than protective, response.

“Kids can still be charged and prosecuted as criminals in 31 states because law has not kept up with reality – the reality that these children are victims of sex trafficking and cannot be criminals at the same time for the same thing,” said SHI founder Linda Smith, at a press conference in Orlando, FL where the National Foundation for Women Legislators is meeting.

“We must stop criminalizing kids for crimes committed against them!” declared 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. Over the last six years, **Georgia**, along with states across the nation, **enacted important laws**:

- From 2011 to 2016 Georgia’s Protected Innocence Challenge grade has gone up from a C to a B.
- Georgia’s sex trafficking law protects all minor victims under 18 without requiring proof of force, fraud, or coercion.
- Buyers of sex with children can be prosecuted under the human trafficking law.
- House Bill 725 enacted on April 26, 2016 brought CSEC and child sex trafficking under the definition of “child abuse,” allowing child welfare to respond and provide services in such cases.

Despite much progress, SHI research **found critical gaps** in these areas in the laws of **Georgia**:

- While child sex trafficking victims may raise an affirmative defense, they can still be prosecuted for prostitution offenses under state law.
- Avenues to specialized services for child sex trafficking victims are not required by law.
- Georgia’s human trafficking law does not apply to persons who facilitate child sex trafficking.

[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.sharedhoope.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.