



“Stop Criminalizing Kids for Crimes Committed Against Them!”

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

WASHINGTON, D.C., Washington has been a national leader in taking steps to prevent and tackle domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST). Washington has continued to address gaps in its laws throughout the last six years, allowing it to be one of the first “A” states, 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. However, despite achieving an “A” rating for its overall response to child sex trafficking, Washington can still prosecute children for engaging in commercial sex.

“Kids can still be charged and prosecuted as criminals in 31 states, including Washington, 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 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 Linda Smith, founder of SHI.

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 past six years, **Washington**, along with states across the nation, **enacted important laws:**

- Washington is one of a few states that have clear, buyer-applicable language under the trafficking law, which was enacted before federal legislation.
- While Washington is one of SHI’s “A” states that still criminalize child sex trafficking victims for crimes committed against them, the state has continuously worked to improve their laws and responses, enabling it to be one of the first states to achieve an A in 2013.
- From 2011 to 2016 Washington’s Protected Innocence Challenge grade has gone up from a B to an A.
- The human trafficking law does not require proof of use of force, fraud, or coercion when the victim is a minor.
- Domestic minor sex trafficking victims are provided a protective response which includes an avenue to specialized services.

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

- Domestic minor sex trafficking victims face criminalization for commercial sex acts committed as a result of their victimization and could face detention as a juvenile offender rather than receiving specialized services.

[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.