



**NEW REPORT SHOWS NEED FOR COMMITMENT TO STEADY LEGISLATIVE IMPROVEMENT TO
COMBAT CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING**

WASHINGTON, D.C., A report released today by [Shared Hope International](#) demonstrates a 7-year trend in improved state laws that combat child sex trafficking, yet also calls attention to the fact that a number of states have not progressed. As the only U.S. NGO working in every state to end the scourge of child sex trafficking through legal reform, Shared Hope continues to press for a national standard of victim centered justice which can only be achieved if all states are actively working to free child sex trafficking victims from the stigma of prostitution.

When launched in 2011, the [Protected Innocence Challenge Report Cards](#) scored 26 states with a failing grade on 41 points of law that impact child sex trafficking. Fifteen more, nearly as bad, scored a grade of D. The 2017 Protected Innocence Challenge grades illustrate the significant progress in our overall score as a nation – the national average has risen 23 points, from 59.1% in 2011 to 82% in 2017. The report identifies the major strides made by five most improved states: MI, WV, KS, WY, and MA, and also highlights states like KS and MT whose grades went up four levels over the seven year period.

When compared to just one year ago, nine states improved at least one grade level and of special note, WV improved two grades--from D to B--and along with CA is recognized as most improved. KS and OK each scored an A for the first time, and TN received the highest A – 96.5 out of a possible 102.5. The total number of states with As and Bs is now 36, compared to only 2 Bs and no As the first year of the Protected Innocence Challenge.

Five states – NY, NM, ME, SD, and VT – remain at the lowest level, a D. Four states – IL, MO, NY, and VT – have failed to improve their grade in the seven years of the Protected Innocence Challenge.

The eight “A” states of 2017 demonstrate that, as a complex issue, trafficking cannot be addressed by one law alone. The report shows that these A states continuously address trafficking, coming back each legislative session to introduce new bills that improve their laws, expanding victim protections, holding buyers accountable, or providing new tools to law enforcement.

But gaps remain. Former Congresswoman and Shared Hope founder Linda Smith asks, “When can you have an A but still be failing victims? The *Challenge* shows that “A” states can have critical gaps in their legal framework that are failing victims, in particular continuing to criminalize children who are victims of sex trafficking.” Shockingly, [27 states](#) still permit a child to face prostitution charges.

Toni McKinley, survivor of child sex trafficking and Director of Therapeutic Services at The Refuge for DMST explains how this impacts survivors, “As a child, I was punished for the crimes that were committed against me. Today, despite earning an “A” grade, Texas is still failing to fully protect survivors of child sex trafficking from criminalization.”

Shared Hope’s grades will be released in a livestream briefing on November 15 at 11am. [Watch here](#). It will be followed at 12pm by a virtual panel discussion with survivors of sex trafficking. [Register for the panel here](#).

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[Shared Hope International](#) is an international anti-trafficking organization focusing on prevention, restoration and justice for victims of sex trafficking. [Linda Smith](#), served as a state legislator and Member of Congress from Washington State (1983-1998), and is the author of *Renting Lacy* (2009). She founded Shared Hope in 1998.

MEDIA MATERIALS:

For media convenience, a variety of resources are available at www.sharedhope.org/press.