



NEW REPORT SHOWS WEST VIRGINIA'S NOTEWORTHY LEGISLATIVE PROGRESS TO COMBAT CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

WASHINGTON, D.C., A report released today by Shared Hope International, highlighted West Virginia as the second most improved state in the nation when it comes to 2017 legislation designed to eliminate child sex trafficking. It is the only state this year to raise its grade two levels. Recognizing the important passage of HB 2318, West Virginia's grade increased from a D to B. Shared Hope applauds West Virginia's leadership in passing this bill that significantly increases victim protections and offender accountability.

As the only U.S. NGO working in every state to end the scourge of child sex trafficking through legal reform, Shared Hope launched the Protected Innocence Challenge (PIC) in 2011. PIC provides Report Cards, grading all 50 states and D.C., by applying a framework composed of 41 areas of law that set the minimum standards for combating child sex trafficking. In that first year, 26 states, including West Virginia, received a failing grade. Overall, the 2017 PIC grades illustrate significant progress in our score as a nation – the national average has risen 23 points on the grade scale in seven years, from 59% to 82%. Notably, West Virginia has improved by 43.5% over that period, and moved up two full grade levels from 2016 to 2017 to join 26 other "B" states.

Critical collaborations between legislators, survivor-serving agencies, and community leaders supported the passage of HB 2318. As a result, the state has renewed its commitment to ensuring protections for survivors, punishment for traffickers and buyers, and the provision of important tools for law enforcement to investigate and combat child sex trafficking.

"I think trying to combat human trafficking is one thing that Democrats and Republicans can agree on," said West Virginia Delegate Barbara Fleischauer. "For a variety of reasons, some of them political, we had a frustrating time getting this bill passed -- it took three attempts. But it was great it finally made it this year. I hope we will see more prosecutions, since we know [trafficking] is happening."

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.