

PREVENTION AND TRAINING

POLICY GOAL: State law mandates child sex trafficking prevention education in schools.

Schools play a key role in addressing child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), both in prevention and intervention. With approximately 180 school days in a year averaging 6.64 hours per day, students can spend nearly 1200 hours in school each year.¹ Even during the period in which they are being exploited, child sex trafficking victims often continue attending school.² Further, children, in general, are a vulnerable population that have increased susceptibility to trafficking.³ Therefore, trained school personnel can play an important role in engaging in direct prevention work or implementing prevention education with students.⁴ Developmentally- and age-appropriate child sex trafficking curriculum can serve as a valuable tool for supporting students' ability to recognize and safely report suspected or known personal exploitative experiences or the experiences of their peers. As such, state law should require the provision of prevention education in all public schools.

To increase the impact of prevention efforts, states should consider mandating an age and culturally appropriate, gender-neutral curriculum for all grade levels (i.e. kindergarten through 12th grade). While the average age of entry into CSEC has been difficult to determine, some studies have shown that it could be around ages 12-14.⁵ Additionally, most children have access to smartphones or other Internet-connected devices, which increases their vulnerability to CSEC. According to a Pew Research report, 80% of parents stated that their child age 5 to 11 uses a tablet computer and 63%

use a smartphone.⁶ Moreover, this same study showed that 73% of parents believe that age 12 is an appropriate age for a child to have their own phone.⁷ Studies have shown that technology is playing an increasing role in recruitment and grooming for sex trafficking.⁸ This information, coupled with identified cases of child sex trafficking involving young children, highlight the importance of initiating prevention efforts with elementary age children and continuing it through grade 12.

To guide the implementation, states should consider including additional language on training requirements within the law. For example, state law should ensure that the prevention education curriculum is survivor-informed by a group of survivors with a diverse set of experiences. Survivors of CSEC and sex trafficking can provide valuable first-hand knowledge related to traffickers, buyers, grooming and recruitment tactics, and victim vulnerabilities as well as successful methods for identifying, engaging, and serving this population.⁹ The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments also recommends that schools partner with community partners such as school boards, service providers, governmental agencies, and local law enforcement in the development and implementation of a comprehensive prevention program for students that can offer insight in trafficking trends in the local community as well as local response and supports.¹⁰ With the breadth of survivor-informed resources available, schools could utilize existing resources to fulfill prevention curriculum requirements.

To facilitate implementation, supplemental information addressing CSEC prevention, could be added to existing age-appropriate health/sexual health education curriculums. States may also consider utilizing a holistic prevention approach by adopting a K-12 curriculum guide that addresses healthy relationships, Internet safety, social justice, self-esteem/self-determination, history of

slavery and exploitation, and other related topics. Importantly, all CSEC prevention education efforts should provide not only a thorough understanding of the issue but also tools and resources related to disclosure and accessing safety if a child feels like they or someone they know are at risk of, or currently being, commercially sexually exploited.

DRAFTING CONSIDERATIONS: *To accomplish this policy goal, state law should...*

- ▶ Require child sex trafficking prevention education in schools.
- ▶ Ensure the prevention education curriculum is developmentally- and age-appropriate.

RELATED ISSUES:

6.5 State law mandates child sex trafficking training for school personnel.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES:

- ▶ Chosen

- 1 *School and Staffing Survey*, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (2008) https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_035_s1s.asp (last visited Nov. 16, 2020).
- 2 Nat'l Human Trafficking Res. Ctr, *Educators and Human Trafficking: In-Depth-Review*, POLARIS PROJECT (2011) <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/In%20Depth%20Review%20for%20Educators.pdf> (last visited Nov. 16, 2020).
- 3 *Introduction to Human Trafficking: A Guide for Texas Education Professionals*, Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force (2014) <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Intro%20to%20HT%20for%20Educational%20Professionals%20-%20TX%20Depr%20of%20Ed.pdf> (last visited Nov. 16, 2020).
- 4 Nat'l Human Trafficking Res. Ctr, *supra* note 2.
- 5 Tamara E. Hurst, *Prevention of Child Sexual Exploitation: Insights from Adult Survivors*, J. Interpersonal Violence 1 (2019) <https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy.wcl.american.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0886260519825881> (last visited Oct. 16, 2020).
- 6 Brooke Auxier, *Parting Children in the Age of Screens*, PEW RESEARCH CTR. (2020) <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/parenting-children-in-the-age-of-screens/> (last visited Nov. 16, 2020).
- 7 *Id.*
- 8 *Survivor Insights: The Role of Technology in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking*, THORN (2018) http://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Thorn_Survivor_Insights_061118.pdf (last visited Nov. 16, 2020).
- 9 MARISSA CASTELLANOS, M.S.W., GRETCHEN HUNT, J.D., BETHANY GILOT, M.S., AMY NACE-DEGONDA, B.A., MELODY WRAY, THE SOUTHEAST REGIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING ADVISORY GROUP, *GUIDING PRINCIPLES: FOR AGENCIES SERVING SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING* (2018).
- 10 Nat'l Ctr on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, *Community Involvement*, AIR (2020) <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/human-trafficking-americas-schools/community-involvement> (last visited Nov. 16, 2020).