

## **The horror of child sex trafficking: New Year's release by Shared Hope International shakes states to action!**

**Building on a decade of successful child sex trafficking advocacy through the Protected Innocence Challenge, Shared Hope International's Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking provides an objective evaluation of current deficiencies in state laws and a blueprint for state action that will lead to national change.**

Washington, DC, January 1, 2021 – Throughout its 22-year history, Shared Hope has inspired lawmaking that brings justice and ensures protective responses to victims of child sex trafficking. Leveraging its position as a nationally recognized leader in the fight to end this horror, the organization created the Protected Innocence Challenge in 2011--report cards that each year through 2019 graded every state and DC on the fundamental fabric of laws that address the issue. With the first grading period in 2021, **Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking** will motivate states to move beyond fundamentals. This project serves as the blueprint for the next phase in Shared Hope's campaign for *State Action. National Change.* and the catalyst for stronger state legislation to protect commercially sexually exploited youth.

“Twenty-six states earned failing grades when we began grading in 2011. Many did not even have a child sex trafficking law or make it a crime to buy sex with a child. Now, a decade later, all states have a child sex trafficking law and a legal framework for holding buyers of sex with children accountable. By 2019, two thirds of the states achieved a grade of A or B,” said Linda Smith, Shared Hope's founder and president. “We succeeded in identifying the legal foundation needed for transformation in policy, practice, and culture; now, **Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking** will address the significant gaps that remain, particularly in protections provided for survivors.”

This [video](#) showcases the look towards the future.

Understanding the critical role of state law in eradicating child and youth sex trafficking, Shared Hope utilizes the tools of grassroots mobilization, legislative advocacy, technical assistance, and collaboration to prioritize policies that strengthen both prevention and victim protections. This includes addressing and funding specialized services for victims and strengthening demand enforcement.

**Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking** consists of 40 key points of law, grouped into **six issue areas**, that are needed under state law to provide a protective response to child and youth survivors of sex trafficking.

The six key issue areas are:

1. **Criminal Provisions:** Clear criminal laws, including those that criminalize buyers of sex with children, are needed to ensure all sex trafficking offenders can be held accountable.
2. **Identification of and Response to Victims:** State laws must identify all commercially sexually exploited children as victims of trafficking and provide for a protective, rather than punitive response.
3. **Continuum of Care:** To break the cycle of exploitation, state laws must provide victims access to funded, trauma-informed services.
4. **Access to Justice for Trafficking Survivors:** A range of civil and criminal justice remedies must be available for victims under the law.

5. Tools for a Victim-Centered Criminal Justice Response: Criminal justice procedures for the benefit and protection of victim-witnesses must be provided under the law.

6. Prevention and Training: To help prevent trafficking and promote just responses to child sex trafficking victims, training must be required by law for child welfare, juvenile justice, law enforcement, prosecutors and school personnel, and prevention education required for students.

“The past decade has led to new research and opportunities to listen to survivors, bringing ever increasing clarity to laws and policies that must be in place to fully respond to child and youth sex trafficking,” said Smith. “At the core of this shift is stopping the victim blaming that prevents children from being recognized as victims and accessing needed services. There is clearly much work to be done. Nineteen states still allow child victims to be charged with prostitution; in nineteen others the buyer can assert a defense that he didn’t know how old the child was; in nineteen more, buyers are not considered offenders under the child sex trafficking law. While we recognize changing laws to ensure greater protection for victims can be a heavy lift for states and providing services presents resource challenges, we’ve seen some states take the lead on this and we’re confident others will learn from their example.”

To learn how to take action by reaching out to your legislators on **Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking**, visit [here](#).

To support implementation of this advanced framework, our Policy Team will remain available to provide rapid technical assistance to support legislators, advocates, and state agencies; technical assistance requests can be submitted [here](#).

#### ABOUT SHARED HOPE INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1998 by then U.S. Congresswoman Linda Smith, Shared Hope International strives to prevent the conditions that foster sex trafficking, promote restoration for survivors of sex trafficking, and bring justice to vulnerable women and children. Smith’s past experience also includes her role as a Washington state legislator heading Child and Family Services and uniquely qualifies her to lead the organization’s efforts to improve state laws that address child sex trafficking.

A non-profit Christian organization, Shared Hope engages in diverse activities that confront sex trafficking in communities throughout America. Our efforts include training first responders and community members to identify warning signs of trafficking and employ intervention techniques to appropriately respond to child trafficking victims; providing restorative services to affected children and women; and offering legislative support to those focused on strengthening laws that fight child sex trafficking. Our vision is to coordinate a national U.S. network of protection to improve the response to victims of trafficking. We believe we can create a world where every survivor is surrounded by trained professionals, an alert community, just law and policy, knowledgeable service providers and appropriate shelter options.

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[Media Kit](#) for **Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking**