



CAROLYN TOMEI
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 41
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 6, 2011

Multnomah County Board of Commissioners
501 SE Hawthorne Street
Portland, OR

Dear Chair Cogan and members of the Board of Commissioners:

As a State Representative, serving parts of Multnomah County, and as co-chair of the House Human Services Committee, I write in strong support of the proposal to fund shelter beds for the victims of child sex trafficking.

Ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children has been a focus of lawmakers for several years. Working with local law enforcement, district attorneys, advocate groups and others, we passed legislation last session that increases penalties on those who buy sex from minors and also redefined compelling prostitution to make it easier to prosecute the traffickers. The piece missing from that package is protection and treatment for the victims.

Multnomah County has an active group working on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. An essential component of helping these youth is providing them with safe and secure shelter and treatment. These youth are difficult to place in foster homes; sending them to juvenile detention treats them like criminals, rather than victims. We NEED to have a safe place for these kids, focused on their very special needs.

I am especially supportive of this proposal for the data and information it can collect. Before we develop funding for treatment and shelter for these youth on a state level, we need hard data about what our money will accomplish. Having an existing, although modest, shelter and treatment program in Multnomah County can provide data on the successful outcomes for these youth. Knowing that these programs can actually get kids safely off the street, and keep them off the streets, will be a vital part of garnering support for additional money at the state level.

The youth caught up in child prostitution are *victims*. They come from our cities, our suburbs, our rural areas. They are OUR kids. They need a safe place and specialized treatment to escape from the traffickers who peddle flesh on the streets. I strongly urge you to support this proposal.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Tomei
State Representative