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President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C., 20500

Dear President Obama:

I look forward to hearing your State of the Union Address later this month and know you will discuss a variety of issues confronting our country and the economy. I am writing to encourage you to mention one important issue that your administration addressed in a forum last year: sex trafficking.

Sadly, the average age of entry into sex trafficking is 12-14 years old, and the consequences for these children are dire. Girls who become victims of sex trafficking face a range of both physical and mental maladies, including reproductive health issues, pain, weight loss, depression, PTSD, anxiety disorders and suicidal thoughts.

While there are numerous partisan fights that divide Washington, this is an issue where there are members on both sides of the aisle working together to enact solutions. My colleagues and I have introduced several pieces of legislation to tackle the problem. I have introduced the Child Sex Trafficking Data and Response Act with Congresswoman Louise Slaughter that addresses the high prevalence of sex trafficking of youth in foster care and the lack of reliable data. Congresswoman Gwen Moore and I have also authored the Stop Exploitation Through Trafficking Act that would extend safe harbor provisions to the national level and ensure minors are treated as victims and cannot be prosecuted for prostitution. Finally, both chambers of Congress have introduced resolutions declaring "Our Daughters Are Not For Sale."

My guest at your State of the Union address will be Vednita Carter, who is not only a tireless advocate for victims of sex trafficking but also a survivor herself. Vednita founded Breaking Free, which is just one of many outstanding in-state resources Minnesota has to combat sex trafficking. The state continues to be a leader in developing an approach to prevent trafficking and providing an appropriate response to victims through its Safe Harbor Laws.

Again, I encourage you to raise the problem of sex trafficking in your State of the Union address and work with members of both parties to take action to protect vulnerable children from being subjected to violence and exploitation. I look forward to working with you and others in any way I can to make progress on this important issue.

Respectfully,



Erik Paulsen
Member of Congress