

February 18, 2013

The Honorable Jeff Baker
Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Legislature

Re: Support for House Bill 2334

Mr. Chairman Baker and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for your hard work surrounding HB 2334. Oregon Center for Christian Voices (OCCV) unites Christians in Oregon to seek God's justice. We base our personal and public values on the life of Jesus Christ as taught to us in the Bible and advocate for policies which reflect Christ's care for the poor, oppressed and the most vulnerable.

Since 2009, OCCV has supported and advocated for laws which address human trafficking in Oregon. As an Oregon resident and member of OCCV's Legislative Committee, I have been following the development of HB 2334.

Fighting human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children has been a passion for some time. In the Bible, God cries out for a response from his people in Psalm 82:3-4, saying "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." This invitation to serve and protect others has had a deep impact on how I conduct myself as a civil servant.

For seven years, I have worked for the Department of Human Services Child Welfare as a caseworker and at the Child Abuse Hotline. At DHS, I compile and track data regarding children from Oregon who have been sexually exploited for the commercial gain of others. Doing so, I hear and read stories of minors who have been ravaged by the effects of sexual abuse and violence that often happen through the criminal act of prostitution. Our data shows Oregon's children are also moved to other states by their exploiters making them more isolated from their support systems and protections.

By force, fraud, or coercion, exploiters compel their victims to engage in prostitution. Last week, a "pimp" from Portland was sentenced to life in prison after his third conviction for sexually exploiting others and abusing children. He has been sexually exploiting women and children for over 20 years in multiple states and some of his victims were 14-16 years old.

In supporting HB 2334 and its modifications to the crimes of promoting and compelling prostitution, it will allow law enforcement to further protect victims by granting them the ability to intervene even before the sexual act of prostitution occurs. This change allows for earlier intervention and could protect our children from being sexually abused, assaulted, and taken to other states to be bought and sold for profit.

If those making attempts to compel and promote prostitution are held accountable by our justice system at an earlier juncture, it could prevent them from future criminal activity that targets vulnerable children and women, and instilling the belief that the risks of arrest and

prosecution are higher than the perceived reward of their crime.

OCCV supports including language which allows for a defense of a person who attempted to engage in promoting or compelling prostitution who was under 18 years old and influenced by a person allegedly engaged in promoting or compelling prostitution.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 2334.

Sincerely,

Stacy Bellavia
Legislative Committee
Oregon Center for Christian Voices