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Senate Democrats vote to protect child sex trafficking victims

HB 2740 cracks down on anyone trafficking someone younger than 18

SALEM – Oregon Senate Democrats voted to pass a bipartisan bill today that protects victims of child sex trafficking, while holding more offenders accountable for their crimes.

Under current law, a person commits a sex trafficking crime if he or she knowingly recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides or obtains another person – or attempts to do so – for a commercial sex act and knows or recklessly disregards the fact that the other person is younger than 15. Currently, when a trafficking victim is 15 or older, the prosecution must prove that the individual was coerced, forced or defrauded into committing the act.

House Bill 2740 – which was carried to passage in the Senate by Sen. Kathleen Taylor (D-Portland) – fixes that issue by expanding the age of a minor in trafficking cases to include anyone younger than 18, without having to prove coercion, fraud or use or threat of physical force.

“Anyone younger than 18 is a minor and, thanks to this bill, the law will make it easier to prosecute offenders and hold them accountable for their crimes in more cases where minors are involved,” Taylor said. “In many cases of child sex trafficking, the trafficker grooms the victim, manipulating them into compliance without necessarily using force, which young victims are very vulnerable to.”

Once HB 2740 becomes law, that burden of proof that the victim was forced, coerced or defrauded into committing a commercial sex act will be removed when the victim is younger than 18. The bill makes the age threshold more appropriate because those older than 18 are considered adults.

“Minors are absolutely unable to consent to these types of activities,” Taylor said. “Victims who are 16- or 17-year-olds should have this same added protection as those under 15 years old, and perpetrators who prey on minors – on children – should be held accountable in a consistent way, no matter the exact age of that minor. This bill allows that to happen.”

The Statewide Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Workgroup – a bipartisan, bicameral group which is co-chaired by Taylor and Rep. John Huffman (R-The Dalles) – collaborated to bring this bill forward.

In the Portland metro area alone – according to the Department of Human Services and the Sexual Assault Resource Center – 469 children were identified as victims of commercial sexual exploitation between 2009 and 2013. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, more than 300 calls in 2016 originated in Oregon.

Oregon is joining 46 other states and Washington, D.C., in closing the gap in state law to define minors in sex trafficking cases as anyone younger than 18. It prioritizes protecting child sex trafficking victims, while clamping down on offenders.

HB 2740 now goes to Gov. Kate Brown for signature.

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