



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Bill cracks down on “johns,” will help young sex trafficking victims *HB 2714 significantly increases fine for engaging in prostitution with minors*

SALEM – The Senate approved a bill this morning that makes a significant change to how the crime of paying for sex with an underage prostitute is prosecuted in Oregon. HB 2714 increases the fine for paying for sex with a minor from \$6,250 to \$20,000 and separates in statute the crime of soliciting prostitution from the crime of offering prostitution. Today’s vote came following an event held by the Women’s Health and Wellness Alliance to raise awareness around women’s issues. HB 2714 is a priority bill for the Alliance this session.

“Sex trafficking victims are not criminals and should not be treated like criminals,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland), co-chair of the Alliance. “This bill separates the crime of paying for sex from the crime of offering it. In most cases, an underage person who is involved in prostitution is in many ways a victim, stuck in an abusive and controlling relationship with a pimp. The consequences should be different for a sex-trafficked young woman and a man who pays money to abuse her.”

Currently, state law treats both buyers and sellers of sex as equally guilty. HB 2714 separates out the offense of prostitution in statute, recognizing the difference between the crime committed by a person offering sex for money and the crime of purchasing sex. Advocates argue that this is an important distinction because most persons who are trafficked into prostitution are victims themselves and those who pay for prostitution should be more harshly punished.

Additionally, HB 2417 eliminates the defense that a “john” is unaware of a prostitute’s age if that person is a minor. This component of the bill complements a bill passed earlier this session in the Senate, SB 425, which eliminates a pimp’s defense that he is unaware of an underage victim’s age. Together with steep increases in the fine for paying for sex with a minor, advocates hope HB 2417 will act as a deterrent to this crime.

“This is an incredibly predatory and devastating industry. The illegal sex trade is a serious issue across Oregon, especially for young girls who are sold into prostitution or who turn to a pimp and can’t find their way out of an abusive relationship,” said Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham). “This bill is a critical step toward recognizing the problems our law enforcement and social services have encountered in Oregon and will help us better provide services to victims of sex trafficking.”

An amendment introduced in the Senate adds a mandatory seven day jail stay for second offenses.

“This bill is important because it will hold people accountable to their actions, especially if they pay for a sexual act with a minor,” said Senator Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene), who carried the bill on the floor. “Claiming ignorance of a victim’s age is not an acceptable defense. House Bill 2714 makes this clear while significantly increasing the punishment for paying an underage person for sex.”

HB 2714 was introduced by Representative Carolyn Tomei (D-Milwaukie). The bill now goes back to the House for concurrence.

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