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**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)  
On Preventing Sex Trafficking in Foster Care**  
*As prepared for delivery*

Abraham Lincoln said, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong."

Slavery in any form is an injustice that we must stop. Our country has fought long and bloody wars to end slavery, both at home and abroad. Unfortunately, not all forms of slavery have been abolished in America. Human trafficking, which includes both labor and sex trafficking, is not unique to third-world countries. It exists right here in America.

It is quickly becoming one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world. Twenty-seven million people are bought and sold into slavery each year, many of them children.

At least 100,000 children are exploited every year in the United States. Most of these kids are only between 12 and 14 years old.

This committee has jurisdiction over the nation's foster care and adoption system. Today we will focus our attention on the children most vulnerable to trafficking predators – foster children.

Fifty to eighty percent of the children that are exploited and sold each year in America are connected to the foster care system. The tough background and unstable upbringing of many foster youth increases their risk of exploitation.

These children frequently suffer from a history of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. They are typically moved from place to place with little or no warning. These factors combined with a desire for love and affection and a lack of appropriate adult supervision increase their risk of exploitation. However, all young people can become victims of this crime.

We will hear today from a survivor of this horrific crime. Miss Asia Graves will share with us her first-hand experience.

This abuse even occurs in my home state of Montana, which I often refer to as one big small town. It's a place where we pride ourselves on old-fashioned values – a place where we know our neighbors and look out for each other – and yet we are not immune.

I'll share the story of one Montanan, a young woman we will refer to as Kay. Kay was born and raised in a solid family from Kalispell. She was an exceptional young person with everything in place for a bright future.

At 15, she met a handsome and charismatic man at a high school party. He slipped a drug into her drink. He sold Kay for sex in exchange for money and drugs.

We can't imagine her horror upon waking. She wasn't the same. She had no one to turn to. The young man used her fear and depression to isolate her. Kay became addicted to heroin and was repeatedly sold to her own peers for drugs and money.

Thanks to Windie Jo Fischer, a local outreach worker, Kay was able to escape. Windie knew what Kay was going through because she had survived a similar experience at age 13. Today, Kay is doing well. Still, too many young women just like Kay continue to suffer every day.

The Bakken oil boom in Montana and North Dakota has brought thousands of jobs and economic activity to the area. But the population spike has also brought increased crime – drugs, gun crimes and prostitution. Victims are difficult to identify, and they are often coerced and threatened into silence.

Difficulty is not an excuse for inaction.

We cannot sit by and allow any more children to suffer in silence. These are our sons and our daughters. It's our job to protect them.

That is what today's hearing is all about. We are here to expose this horrific problem and find out what more we should be doing to keep our kids safe.

Too often, sexually exploited children have nowhere to go for help. The people they turn to don't know how to handle these cases.

As a result, sex trafficking victims are often arrested and placed in juvenile detention. But raped and abused children should not be treated as criminals.

The juvenile justice system is making progress, but law enforcement needs the help and expertise of social workers, mental health professionals, judges and teachers to find the right solutions for vulnerable children.

It is time for the child welfare system to do its part to end sex trafficking. Today's witnesses will tell us about the limitations of the current system to help victims.

As a nation, we have a responsibility to protect our girls and boys. People who are buying and selling our children must be stopped. As Lincoln said, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." For as long as slavery exists in any form, we must fight to end it.

Before we move on to introducing our panel, I'd like to remind Senators that around 10:30 we will turn to the nomination of Michael Froman. Mr. Froman is nominated to be the United State Trade Representative. He testified before this Committee last Thursday, and responded to 150 questions for the record over the weekend. I believe Mr. Froman is the right man to lead USTR and lead our ambitious trade agenda. He deserves our support.

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