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BAUCUS SAYS CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM MUST DO MORE TO FIGHT SEX TRAFFICKING, HELP VICTIMS

Tens of Thousands of Foster Kids Are Commercially Trafficked Each Year

WASHINGTON – At a Senate Finance Committee hearing today examining the growing problem of sex trafficking youth in foster care, Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said America's child welfare system must do more to end this heinous crime and find appropriate ways to help victims.

"As a nation, we have a responsibility to protect our children and youth. Yet today, we are failing them, especially foster children, who are often the most vulnerable to child sex traffickers," Senator Baucus said. **"The juvenile justice system is making progress helping these young victims of sex trafficking, but law enforcement needs the help and expertise of the entire child welfare system. This must be a team effort and include social workers, mental health professionals, judges and teachers working together to find the right solutions for vulnerable children. It is time for the child welfare system to do its part to end sex trafficking."**

The Finance Committee's jurisdiction includes the nation's foster care programs.

According to the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, at least 100,000 children are exploited every year in the United States. Between fifty and eighty percent of that total are connected to the foster care system, and most victims are between just 12 and 14 years old.

Histories of emotional, physical or sexual abuse and a lack of trustworthy supervision put foster kids at especially high risk of trafficking.

A report released last year by the Congressional Research Service found that Child Protection Service workers are unfamiliar with human trafficking terms and laws, and they often don't know how to handle cases involving trafficked children.

As a result, sex trafficking victims are often arrested and placed in juvenile detention facilities. Senator Baucus, however, said raped and abused children are not criminals, and should not be treated as such. He said law enforcement and the child welfare system must work together to find solutions to help high-risk children and victims of abuse.

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