

The Citizens Were Heard

*Donna M. Hughes
Co-Founder, Citizens Against Trafficking*

Congratulations to the citizens of Rhode Island and national anti-trafficking advocates for the legislative victory in Rhode Island. This past week, the Rhode Island Assembly passed an unprecedented **three** pieces of legislation that will protect victims from sex industry predators and give law enforcement the tools they need to arrest pimps, traffickers, and “johns.”

Governor Donald Carcieri is expected to sign these three bills into law this week. Rhode Island will then have laws that:

- Ban minors from working in any “adult entertainment” business
- Criminalize forced labor as a form of human trafficking
- Enable the prosecution of sex trafficking of minors without proving that coercion was used
- Criminalize the soliciting of commercial sex by prostitutes and “johns”
- Prohibit victims of sex trafficking from being convicted of prostitution offenses

All three bills were sponsored by Representative Joanne Giannini, Democrat from Providence. She faced intense opposition from almost every corner, including some of her usual allies. She never blinked. She worked relentlessly to pass her bills and protect them from being derailed. The people of Rhode Island and national advocates against the commercial sexual exploitation and abuse of victims owe her a debt of gratitude. We need to make sure we give her our support in the future.

Our organization—Citizens Against Trafficking¹—was formed last June because Melanie Shapiro and I saw a need to advocate for good anti-human trafficking and prostitution laws in Rhode

¹ Citizens Against Trafficking is an voluntary, informal alliance of concerned citizens. It has no budget and accepted no funding. We operate on a passion for justice and a dedication to human rights for all, particularly women and children.

Island. The defining moment came when other anti-trafficking organizations—the Rhode Island Coalition Against Human Trafficking and the national group Polaris Project—agreed to support the Senate human trafficking law that omitted forced labor. In addition, these organizations and others refused to support the much needed prostitution bill.

We want to thank the people who contacted the Rhode Island legislators. You made a difference. At the beginning of this process, some people in the Assembly thought they were insulated from public opinion. The tide started to turn when letters, email and calls awakened them to the strong public support for new laws.

Citizens Against Trafficking (CAT) thanks the Rhode Island law enforcement agencies for standing firm for much needed laws, including the Rhode Island State Police, the Rhode Island Police Chiefs' Association, Chief Stephen McCartney of the Warwick Police Department, Colonel Richard Taburini of the Johnston Police Department, Chief George Kelly of the Pawtucket Police Department, and the Attorney General's Office. In particular Col. Doherty, Superintendent of the Rhode Island State Police, wrote letters, spoke out on several occasions and took a personal interest in the legislative negotiations over the summer, Chief McCartney testified at hearings, and Chief Kelly spoke at the Governor's Press Conference in June.

CAT thanks Governor Donald Carcieri for his continued support for the House prostitution bill and for holding a press conference in June to support it.

CAT thanks the *Providence Journal* Deputy Opinion Page Editor Ed Achorn for his fearless columns supporting the prostitution bill and for naming obstructionists. He kept the legislative process open to the public.

CAT thanks Bishop Thomas Tobin of the Diocese of Providence for his persistent advocacy and Father Bernard Healey for his excellent editorial in *The Catholic*: "While Rhode Island is known for its independent spirit, this spirit is diminished in every woman forced into prostitution and human trafficking because of a flaw in the law. Rhode Islanders will continue to hang their heads in shame until the scourge of indoor prostitution is addressed in our state and can be properly prosecuted. The Church stands firmly opposed to prostitution of any kind... This shameful scourge must end."

CAT thanks national anti-trafficking coalition leader Michael Horowitz for his steadfast support and advice.

CAT thanks Richard J. Israel, former Attorney General and Superior Court Judge of Rhode Island, for using his respected authority to advocate for the prostitution bill. He wrote to the Senate: "If my long years of service and my old grey head have any value left, I beseech you to set aside any misplaced libertarianism and to restore our State to a posture of decency and respect."

CAT thanks Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in the U.S. State Department, for his comments in a national address: "There is a need for both a legal and a cultural message that does not tolerate prostitution. ... It is a legitimate concern that a hands-off approach toward the so-called 'sex industry' can result in a zone of impunity in which police can't go, and where traffickers can exploit their prey."

CAT thanks Ernie Allen, the president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, for providing crucial information that Rhode Island could not be a partner in the FBI Innocence Lost National Initiative because we don't have a law against prostitution. Since 2003 the Innocence Lost Initiative has rescued almost 900 victims and convicted over 510 pimps.

CAT thanks Eric and Hema Bulmer for bravely speaking out about the spa-brothel next to their business. They described a victim bursting into their store asking for help and the negative impact the brothel had on their family-oriented business.

CAT thanks Rev. Lyle Mook and over 240 members of Christ Church in East Greenwich for signing a petition in favor of Representative Giannini's prostitution and trafficking bills.

CAT thanks Laura Lederer, Vice-President of Global Centurion, and Robert Flores, former federal prosecutor and former administrator of the United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, for their important letters on legal technicalities that gave crucial support for Representative Giannini's House prostitution bill over the Senate prostitution bill.

CAT thanks Rev Darin R. Collins and the members of the Berean Baptist Church for supporting Representative Giannini's prostitution bill from the beginning.

CAT thanks Kevin Ryan, president of Covenant House, the country's largest agency serving homeless and sexually exploited youth, and Mary Leary, law professor at The Catholic University and former sex crimes prosecutor, for writing: "The Rhode Island legislature is facing a great moral test. How will it treat those human beings, including many youth, so damaged by prostitution? ... The claim that keeping prostitution decriminalized helps these women and children, though well intended, is simply misguided. It allows for more people to be victimized in prostitution, hampers police investigation, and legitimizes the buying and selling of people. The time has come for Rhode Island to replace an indifference to this sexual victimization with a step to end prostitution and trafficking. To do so not only protects and enhances the dignity of those in the shadows of life, but all of us as we stand together as a community against the sexual exploitation and trafficking of others."

CAT thanks Lt. Roberto DaSilva of the Pawtucket Police Department for his moving first hand description of what he sees in his community: "I have seen the desperate mother come to the

police station looking for her missing daughter. Her fifteen year old daughter was found to have been posted on Craigslist and was being pimped at a local hotel. I have also seen what a life of drug abuse and prostitution does to a person. I have seen vibrant young women deteriorate and become a shell of themselves in a matter of a few years.” Lt. DaSilva played an important second role as a Representative in the House.

CAT thanks Concetta Flacone-Codding of Danielson, CT, for writing: “Rhode Island has become a joke and a laughingstock on CNN and FOX news stations. First the loophole, then with 16 year old girls being allowed to strip. There are many dirty little secrets in Rhode Island, but guess what? They are not secrets anymore.”

CAT thanks Robert P. George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program at Princeton University, for co-authoring an op-ed supporting the prostitution bill and working behind the scenes to generate support for the bill.

CAT thanks Pastor Stuart McCoy and Brian Estrella of the Riverside Evangelical Covenant Church for writing: “We will not tolerate our young people being permitted to dehumanize and objectify themselves. We will do what it takes to be represented accordingly by our lawmakers.” Many of the members of this church signed a petition in favor of the prostitution and trafficking laws.

CAT thanks the American Baptist Women’s Ministry of Rhode Island, especially Donna Landry, who spent many hours contacting other Baptist Churches and urging them to support anti-trafficking and prostitution legislation. At the last Senate hearing, Donna Landry announced her intention to assist victims of trafficking.

CAT thanks Andria Morenzi of Jamestown for writing: “As a mother and educator I am particularly concerned with preserving decency for our young people.”

CAT thanks Matthew Dorozenski, FAIR Fund & The Barnaba Institute; Annie Fukushima, Students & Artists Fighting to End Human Slavery; Alexis Taylor Litos, The Barnaba Institute; and Kathy Maskell and Liz Magill, Love146, for writing a letter to legislators urging them to prevent Rhode Island from becoming “a safe haven for pimps and human traffickers.”

CAT thanks Scott Burns, Executive Director, National District Attorneys’ Association which represents 2,400 state and local prosecutors nationally and 39,000 state and local prosecutors, for writing: “Legalization of the sex trade industry and decriminalization of sexual trafficking undermine the fabric of our communities and create an underclass of victims who cannot be protected by either state or federal systems of justice. The National District Attorneys Association strongly urges Rhode Island legislature to pass legislation prohibiting prostitution.”

CAT thanks Jodi Glass of Rhode Island Take Back the Night for her support and for gathering other supporters.

CAT thanks Janice Shaw Crouse and Brenda Zurita from Concerned Women for America for urging lawmakers to: “close the loophole that allows indoor prostitution in Rhode Island. Prostitution, whether it occurs indoors or outdoors, is devastating to those exploited by it, the community exposed to it and the culture that glamorizes it.”

CAT thanks Lisa Goldblatt-Grace of My Life My Choice Project of the Justice Resource Institute in Boston for telling us that Rhode Island is a destination for pimps exploiting teen girls: “The girls with whom I have worked have frequently talked about being brought to Providence, Rhode Island to “work.” Pimps are well aware of where there is the most fertile ground to make money with the least consequences.”

CAT thanks Jim and Jenny Meyen of Middletown for organizing opposition to brothels and speaking out at the Town Council: “A community like Middletown was able to make it known that we did not want these types of businesses here. I’m here today to suggest that the citizens on Aquidneck Island let our voices be heard at the State capital too.”

CAT thanks the Middletown City Council for a supporting resolution.

CAT thanks Run for Freedom, a national faith-based anti-trafficking organization, for supporting the House bills against prostitution and human trafficking.

CAT thanks Christine M. Gamez who described what she saw on Pontiac Avenue in Providence.

CAT thanks the Rhode Island blog site *Anchor Rising* for discussion and support.

CAT thanks Cherie Jimenez, Director of Kim’s Project in Brighton, Massachusetts, for speaking out against pimps: “I have listened to countless stories of young women that were brought to Rhode Island by their pimps. I speak as a survivor of prostitution and my first hand knowledge of the violence associated with all aspects of the sex trade. My journey out of that life was difficult since it took me many years to finally educate myself and know what it is to live independent from fear and drugs, finding meaningful work and a purpose in life. Your state is the place now to bring women...a human rights catastrophe.”

CAT thanks Pamela Steager, Coordinator of the Rhode Island Peace Alliance.

CAT thanks Ken Franzblau, former New York State Official in charge of training law enforcement officials and service providers about human trafficking law, for criticizing the Senate’s repeal of anti-pimping laws: “It is beyond the range of reasonable disagreement that pimps are cunning, brutal and without restraint. The attempt by the Rhode Island Senate to diminish the

penalties for those who recruit and transport people for prostitution demonstrates either a callous indifference to the victims of pimps or a dangerous unawareness of the realities of prostitution.”

CAT thanks Rev. Anthony Palow, Jr., Senior Pastor of the North Providence Assembly for asking Senators: “How can anyone allow teen boys and girls to work as strippers?”

CAT thanks Suzanna Tiapula, Director of the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, for writing to “strongly urge Rhode Island legislature to pass legislation prohibiting prostitution and preventing the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Rhode Island. These laws will give law enforcement the tools needed to investigate, arrest, and prosecute sex traffickers and to protect child victims of prostitution.”

CAT thanks the Cranston City Council for its supporting resolution.

CAT thanks George Graham and Ruth Dane of Providence for their support.

CAT thanks Michael Shively, a professional criminal justice researcher who has spent 20 years examining the efficacy of efforts to prevent and combat crime, with a focus on prostitution and human trafficking, for writing about the need to have a law against the “johns”: “Customers” or “johns” frequently seek and pay a premium for unprotected intercourse and oral sex, which greatly increases the risks of contracting and spreading STIs, HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis and more. ... The current Rhode Island version of decriminalization has created a frightful situation, where the only winners are the pimps and traffickers.”

CAT thanks Jennifer Moio, Director of Violence Prevention & Advocacy Services at the University of Rhode Island, along with members of the University of Rhode Island Women’s Studies faculty: Dorothy Donnelly, Janet Hagen, Karen Stein, Adria Evans, Jennifer Brant, Noel Ann Brennan, and Laura Beauvais, and Honors Professor Judith Swift, for their support.

CAT thanks Donna Sabella, a mental health nurse, Assistant Professor of Nursing at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania, the founder and director of Project Phoenix, a program to provide support and outreach to girls and women in prostitution, and board member of Dawn’s Place, a residential recovery program in Philadelphia for prostituted and trafficked women, for writing to describe the harm of prostitution and the cruelty of pimps.

CAT thanks Betty Rae Taylor, Pastor, and members of the First Baptist Church of North Kingstown for supporting a law on prostitution.

CAT thanks Gene and Joyce Corl of Wakefield for writing: “Please keep the tough laws against pimps that are already on the books, and I urge you to work toward a tough bill on inside prostitution.”

CAT thanks Amy Page Oberg of Providence for writing: “Now is the time to stand up for the people of Rhode Island and say that we will no longer be the prostitution capital of our country. You have children. Do it for them. If your daughter had a 'boyfriend' who pimped her out on weekends would you support her - or the 'boyfriend'? If your son sold his body to support a drug habit you had been trying to help him cure, would you support that? What if the guy next door to you took up with your daughter and forced her to give herself to other men - wouldn't you stop that?”

And more. There are many more individuals who signed petitions, made calls, and sent letters and emails. Most of them probably did so without telling us. CAT thanks all of you. You communicated clearly to the House and Senate that you wanted laws to stop the sex industry predators. A number of Senators and Representatives didn't want to hear the message at first, but in the end they remembered that they work for you as elected officials.

What's next?

We have to stay vigilante. Police departments are now required to produce a statistical report every six months on arrests, convictions and sentences for prostitution, pimping, and trafficking. This report was added to the bill during negotiations over the summer. We have to use our strength to generate political will among officials, police departments, and the court to effectively enforce the new laws to target the predators and assist victims.

We will continue to research the sex industry in Rhode Island. It is not going to close its doors entirely because of the new laws. In fact, Melanie Shapiro informed me this morning that a new spa-brothel is advertising in the *Providence Phoenix*.

There is a lot of money being made exploiting women, men and children in Rhode Island. But we have proven that citizens' will can be more powerful than money.

CAT co-founders have already met to discuss our next project.