



**Testimony in Opposition of SB 187**  
**An Act Concerning the Transfer of a Child Charged with Certain Offenses to the Criminal Docket and the Grounds for Detention of an Arrested Child**  
**Erin Williamson, LCSW, MPA, Survivor Care Program Director**  
**Committee on Children, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

Distinguished members of the Committee on Children, my name is Erin Williamson, and I have the privilege of serving as the Survivor Care Program Director at Love146, an international anti-trafficking agency. Since joining Love146 in 2014, I have led the development, implementation, and operation of Love146's Connecticut Survivor Care Program, which has provided direct services to over 300 youth who are suspected and confirmed victims of child sex trafficking.

Based on our work with survivors of child sex trafficking across the state and the need to ensure that these children are able to access specialized services to help them address their trauma, I would like to testify in opposition of SB 187, An Act Concerning the Transfer of a Child Charged with Certain Offenses to the Criminal Docket and the Grounds for Detention of an Arrested Child.

Under current Connecticut law, only children who present a risk to public safety should be jailed. This bill seeks to expand the incarceration of children when there is “a strong probability that the child will commit or attempt to commit other offenses injurious to the child” or when there is “probable cause to believe that the child's continued residence in the child's home pending disposition poses a risk to the child.”

Victims of child sex trafficking have experienced significant trauma and present with complex needs. It is not uncommon for them to engage in self-harming behaviors in order to cope with their victimization or reside with caregivers who need assistance caring for them and ensuring their safety. These children and families, however, are in need of mental health and social services to support them, not incarceration.

Incarcerating these children in an effort to “protect them from themselves” sends a message to them, and peers in their community, that the victim is to blame. It also validates the message so often propagated by traffickers to reduce the likelihood that a victim will seek help – that law enforcement and other protective services will either not believe their outcry or will find them at fault for their victimization. It broadly paints these children as juvenile delinquents instead of recognizing that they are victims in need of services due to the crime that was perpetrated *against* them.

This bill is both re-traumatizing and detrimental to children's wellbeing. Many of the youth we have worked with have suffered unspeakable violence as a result of their victimization. Placing them in locked facilities in order to “protect them” can trigger the trauma they have experienced and can have detrimental effects on their physical and mental health, education, and overall wellbeing. These facilities are not equipped to provide victims with the trauma informed response that they need to address the consequences of their victimization.

If youth know that the information they share with providers, law enforcement, and others could be used against them in court, they will be much less likely to report victimization, such as human trafficking, and meaningfully engage in services they so desperately need. In order to effectively identify children who are being trafficked, as well as those responsible for their victimization, and meet their needs, it is critical for children to be able to speak openly about the facts, memories, thoughts, feelings, and coping strategies, including those that are self-harming, associated with their victimization without fear that the information they share could be used to further detain them.



We should not be expending Connecticut’s limited resources to incarcerate children in an effort to purportedly “protect them,” when these actions are likely to cause further harm to children who have already experienced significant trauma. We should instead focus on increasing access to specialized trauma-informed mental health and social services that will have both short and long-term benefits to our children and our communities. Love146 hopes that the Committee will see the importance of protecting our most vulnerable children and join us in opposing SB 178. Thank you for your time and consideration.