



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NOW-NYC Celebrates Passage of Safe Harbor for Exploited Youth Act *Children in the sex trade now eligible for services rather than juvenile detention*

New York, NY—The National Organization for Women in New York City applauds Governor Paterson, the Assembly and Senate leadership for enacting the Safe Harbor Act, changing the state's approach to handling child prostitution arrests. The bill, sponsored by William Scarborough in the Assembly and Dale Volker in the Senate, will defer criminal prosecution for first-time offenders under the age of 16 and provide critical services for the rising number of youth who suffer sexual exploitation.

NOW-NYC has worked to create public awareness of the SHA and the plight of commercially sexually exploited youth in New York. Each year, thousands of children are victims of commercial sexual exploitation throughout New York State. According to research conducted by John Jay College of Criminal Justice, about 4,000 youth are involved in the sex trade in New York City. The average age of entry into the world of prostitution is 15 years old for both girls and boys.

“In our state, selling sex is a harsh reality for girls as young as twelve,” said Sonia Ossorio, President of NOW-NYC. “With this new law in place, the funds that New York State now spends to incarcerate sexually exploited children can be re-directed to cover the cost of providing the specialized services these young victims need in order to live free from abuse.”

According to a report by WESTAT for the New York State Office of Child and Family Services, 67% of victims in New York City are African-American, 74% of exploitation takes place in a hotel or outside, and 75% of it is by strangers. In Upstate New York, 52% of abuse occurred in the child's home while 58% of abusers were adult friends or acquaintances. Finally, 17% of the sex acts were used in films, photos or pornography.

“The Safe Harbor Act will be a critical tool in helping New York State move from prosecuting to protecting children exploited in the commercial sex trade,” Ossorio said. “This law will enable children, many of whom are advertised on craigslist.org and forced to meet quotas or risk violence from their pimps, a way to get out of the commercial sex trade.”

The National Organization for Women is the nation's largest organization working to advance women's rights and improve women's lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is the largest chapter in the country with 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to protect women's reproductive choices, end violence against women and eliminate sex discrimination in our schools, workplaces, and the justice system in New York.