

January 11, 2016

From: Susan Fraser (slfraser@bellsouth.net)

Subject Line: WGA Advocacy: Recovery Services for Child Victims of Sex Trafficking & TRIP TO TALLAHASSEE

As co-chairs of WGA's Advocacy Committee – and with approval of the WGA Steering Committee – we are writing to WGA members to encourage your support of one of our first initiatives of 2016, namely lending support to those seeking an appropriation in Florida's budget for recovery services for child victims of sex trafficking, 86% of whom are girls and many as young as 12 years old.

Situation

In 2012, Florida 'got it right' with passage of the Florida Safe Harbor Act which ensured that children rescued from trafficking are treated as victims, not as criminals. However, virtually no funding was provided for post-trauma services for these children. During the 2015 Legislation Session, WGA took an interest in funding the creation of a statewide pilot network of mental health and other social services called "Open Doors." Based on best practices already in place in Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Georgia, "Open Doors" is a \$3.5 million pilot program specifically focused on a network of highly trained regional first responders, survivor mentors, clinical services, and funding that follows the child. Northeast Florida is one of the target regions for implementation due to its lack of services despite a high incidence both of trafficking and rescuing victims.

While the effort was introduced conceptually in 2015, one of our grantees -- The Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center – is currently working with The Children's Campaign to secure an appropriation in the 2016 Florida Legislature. WGA members, along with their friends, have been asked to support these efforts at a series of key meetings with legislators scheduled for TUESDAY, JANUARY 26.

The "Tally Trip" -- Travel to Tallahassee

The "Tally Trip" on TUESDAY, JANUARY 26 will enable WGA members and their friends to meet with key Duval, St. Johns and Nassau legislators to express their strong support for funding the Open Doors pilot program. These activities will be part of Florida's Children's Week in Tallahassee.

Plenty of experts are already involved; what is needed is a large number of voters with passion and enthusiasm for this issue. The actual meetings are being scheduled through the lobbying team of The Children's Campaign and through the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center (and WGA member). Although it is not necessary, you are encouraged to become as informed as you find you have time for and to speak during any meeting -- and if you have a particular relationship with any legislator, to help us reach out to those individuals.

Next Steps for the "Tally Trip"

If you or your friends are interested in participating, we will leave the morning of Tuesday, January 26, and return the same evening. You will be asked to pay your share of transportation costs (estimated at \$40, depending on the form of transportation selected) and for your meal(s) in Tallahassee. Please contact the Policy Center Trip Coordinator, Tayloe McDonald, **NO LATER THAN 5 PM on January 19** to confirm your participation.

Tayloe McDonald
tcdonald@seethegirl.org
904-598-0901

If you Can't Make the Trip to Tallahassee

One of the most surprising results of WGA's work in mental health in Northeast Florida is the extent of sex trafficking in our region. Here are two more ways for you and your friends to help.

1. Please advocate for our girls and young women by sending a letter to be used during these sessions. Rather than sending a letter directly to your representatives, we are being asked to send our letters to the chief lobbyists on this issue by Monday, January 25. The letters will then be used during the appeals in Tallahassee. The attached file "Open Doors and Letter Writing" has all of the instructions you need on page 2.
2. Learn more about Sex Trafficking in three places on WGA's new website.

<http://stories.wganefl.org/opening-our-eyes-to-a-pervasive-problem/>

<http://us8.campaign-archive1.com/?u=cee88c41a655e7e50a9b178bd&id=9718eccf9c#even>

<https://www.wganefl.org/what-we-do/advocacy>

From your Advocacy Committee Co-Chairs, thank you for your time and attention.

Susan Fraser, sfraser@bellsouth.net (904) 591-8942

and

Kathleen Langford, kateplangford@gmail.com (305) 794-2909

ADVOCACY & WGA: From time to time, and often informed by our grantee agencies, WGA adopts advocacy positions on issues impacting women and girls in Northeast Florida. Recently, we have been made aware that many girls who are in the criminal justice system, or at risk of such involvement, are in fact victims of sex trafficking. This can impact girls as young as 12. Speaking out about the plight of these girls and their needs, both individually and collectively, aligns with our mission of improving the lives of women and girls in Northeast Florida.