

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Hearing:

*HHS and the Catholic Church: Examining the Politicization of
Grants*

Written Testimony for

Andrea C. Powell

Co-founder and Executive Director, FAIR Girls

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Oversight and Government Reform Hearing

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Co-Founder & Executive Director, FAIR Girls

Chairman Issa, Representative Cummings, and Oversight and Government Reform Committee Members,

Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. It is an honor to have this opportunity to speak to you about the complexities of the social service needs of human trafficking victims here in the United States. I would particularly like to thank both Chairman Issa and Representative Cummings for their dedication to the needs of victims of human trafficking, including victims of forced labor and sexual servitude.

Since the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000, the United States Congress has advanced policies to ensure that victims of the horrible crime of human trafficking are offered comprehensive services that are aimed at restoring their dignity and freedom. It is under this light that I hope to share with you my perspective as a social service provider to both foreign and domestic born victims of human trafficking in the United States.

I am the co-founding Executive Director of FAIR Girls, formerly known as FAIR Fund, a nonprofit agency based in Washington D.C. with offices and programs in Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia, Russia, and Uganda. We provide comprehensive and compassionate emergency and long-term care for victims of both forced labor and sex trafficking. We offer each of our clients individualized care that includes counseling, advocacy, and referrals for housing, legal, and medical services. We also offer our clients art therapy, educational support, job training, and employment placement referrals. We primarily serve adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 11 to 21 years old. The majority of our clients who have been trafficked for labor and all of our clients who have been sold for sex have been raped, resulting in serious medical and emotional trauma. In addition to our direct services, FAIR Girls offers prevention education and outreach to young people as well as community training for law enforcement, educators, social service providers, and the local community. Furthermore, we currently co-chair the victim services and training committees of the D.C. Anti Trafficking Task Force. FAIR Girls' programs are based on the needs and experiences of our young clients and our services are survivor-informed and we currently employ survivor staff.

In my testimony, would like to make the following key points:

1. All victims of human trafficking need medical services, particularly women and girls forced into sex trafficking situations;
2. Victims of human trafficking are denied medical treatment during their enslavement, thus making access to immediate medical attention critical and urgent;
3. Victims of forced labor trafficking also need medical attention for harm as a result of hazardous labor, long hours, and in some cases sexual abuse and rape by their traffickers;
4. Service providers for victims of trafficking are there to restore the dignity and freedom of their clients.

In 2000, the federal government passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act or TVPA, which defined human trafficking. The TVPA also created new remedies for victims and recognized that victims can be both foreign nationals and U.S. citizens. The U.S. Department of State estimates that between 17,000 and 14,000 individuals are trafficked into the United States every year and many thousands more are trafficked within our borders.

Under the TVPA, the definition of “severe forms of human trafficking” is categorized into two areas: labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Labor trafficking is a crime that includes the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion bondage, or slavery. Sex trafficking is a crime in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such acts has not attained 18 years of age.

In understanding human trafficking, there are two very important words to keep in mind: exploitation and vulnerability. Anyone can become a victim of human trafficking. Victims can be women, men, children, foreign nationals, U.S. citizens. Victims can be exploited as individuals, with family members, or in small or large groups. A victim can be anyone that a trafficker assesses has vulnerabilities that they can exploit for their own profit.

Traffickers prey upon an individual’s vulnerabilities to lure them into a trafficking situation. There are specific groups of individuals who may be more at risk of being trafficked and enslaved. These groups include undocumented migrants, victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, oppressed and discriminated groups, runaway or orphaned youth, displaced persons, and people who are desperate for a better job and life opportunities.

Sex trafficking can take place on streets, in hotels, in apartments, in massage parlors, brothels, and many other locations. From the experiences of FAIR Girls clients, victims are forced to have sex with between 5 and 20 men a night and are forced to hand over all of the money paid by the individuals who buy them for sex. During their enslavement, they are not permitted to make choices about with whom they have sex, how often they have sex, whether or not to use contraceptives, and where they will have sex. They only eat when their trafficker lets them eat, they cannot seek medical care, and they cannot leave. Every aspect of their life is controlled.

Labor trafficking can take place anywhere where there is a demand for labor. In past cases, victims of forced labor trafficking have been found in households as domestic slaves, working on farms, in private businesses, restaurants, and garment factories. They can be forced to work 20 hours a day for little or no pay. They are under their trafficker’s constant control. Victims of forced labor trafficking, just as victims of sex trafficking, are often lured into a situation through false promises for a better life, debt bondage, threats and actual violence against them and their families. Control is often exerted through language barriers, fear of law enforcement, and physical or sexual abuse. Labor trafficking victims are frequently sexually abused and beaten by their captors.

There are many myths surrounding trafficking victims, especially victims of sex trafficking. These myths include that regardless of their age all prostitutes are criminals; that the victims are paid for their services; and that they are free to leave anytime. However, no one can consent to

be trafficked even if they initially agreed to enter into prostitution. And any person under the age of 18 is considered a victim of trafficking – regardless of any perceived consent – if they are induced to commit any commercial sex act.

Many women and girl victims of sex trafficking are forced to meet what is referred to as a “quota.” If they do not bring their trafficker a certain amount of money per day (often \$500 to \$1000) they will suffer extreme consequences including beatings and brutal rape. A trafficker uses control and abuse to ensure their victims know any efforts to escape will be met with beatings, rape, and in some cases death. FAIR Girls clients have reported seeing other girls nearly beaten to death when they attempted to leave.

All victims of human trafficking need medical services, particularly women and girls forced into sex trafficking situations

Women and girls who are sex trafficked are often forced to have sex with – raped – by 10 to 20 men a night. Based on the experiences of our clients and information from law enforcement, we know that in Latino brothels in downtown D.C., women and girls have been forced to have sex – raped – by up to 40 men a day. In addition to severe physical harm, including sexually transmitted diseases and vaginal bleeding, these women and girls are left with deep emotional scars. Labor trafficking victims also face sexual abuse, including rape, by their traffickers and often need emergency medical attention to address their medical and mental health needs.

In the United States, rape is a sex crime. The protocol when a victim calls the police and says that she has been raped is to immediately take her to the emergency room of a nearby hospital where trained medical professionals can conduct an exam and assessment of her physical and emotional trauma. We all understand that she has been severely violated and abused. We also know that in addition to the trauma, she may have been exposed to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy as a result of the rape. The message is loud and clear: a rape victim needs medical attention before any other services can be administered. A rape victim is often accompanied by a trained counselor or advocate who provides her emotional support, but these individuals cannot make credible medical assessments which is why counselors, lawyers, and social service providers rely upon their trusted medical professional colleagues who can best assess and administer health care to these truly traumatized and sexually abused victims.

A trafficked woman or girl is by definition enslaved. Her trafficker has taken her freedom and stripped her of any ability to make choices, including whether or not to use contraceptives or protection from sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, or other illnesses with the countless men with whom she has been forced to have sex. A trafficker seeks to maximize their profit by forcing their victims to work day and night and because they do not want their victims to have any opportunity to escape, they do not permit their victims to seek medical attention. We have seen many cases where traffickers have intentionally savagely beaten their victims to force a miscarriage.

A sex trafficked woman or girl is forced to have sex with hundreds of men. By definition, she is a rape victim who has been repeatedly raped hundred of times. She, just like a rape victim assaulted outside of a trafficking situation, needs immediate medical attention to determine the

nature and level of her physical and emotional harm. All service providers have an obligation to ensure every single trafficked woman or girl we assist receives the option to obtain medical attention. In most cases, this is the most important step toward regaining a victim's freedom and sense of dignity. All other services, including counseling, legal advocacy, housing placement and job training are secondary to ensuring that a victim's physical health has been attended to by medical professionals. Service providers like FAIR Girls are not medical professionals and cannot be expected to refuse a trafficked person access to a medical referral he or she wants and needs.

The case managers and social service providers at FAIR Girls have assisted more than 300 clients. None of the trafficked women and girls assisted by FAIR Girls have had access to regular medical care. Many of our clients have experienced numerous sexually transmitted diseases and serious gynecological illnesses, including cancer. Other victims suffer from long-term kidney damage due to untreated STDs. The health consequences that these victims face are long-term and often permanent.

In addition to both the reproductive and general health concerns of our clients, many suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression as a direct result of their trafficking. In the case of one client, her trafficker repeatedly held her under water in the hotel bathtub as a means to keep her disorientated. In another case, the trafficker would photograph his victim having sex and threaten to send these photos to her parents. Such continued mental and emotional abuse leaves victims in a very weak and confused state. Medical screening for PTSD and depression is critical to their recovery. Those who suffer from long-term depression are less likely to be able to hold jobs, build new relationships, and begin to regain control over their lives.

Victims of human trafficking are denied medical treatment during their enslavement, thus making access to immediate medical attention critical and urgent

In one case, a teenage girl who was identified as a victim of trafficking was referred to FAIR Girls by law enforcement. The teen girl reported to us that she had been suffering for several weeks from a severe stomachache and thought she could be pregnant. Our team immediately assisted her in accessing medical care. Upon examination, the doctor discovered that large fragments of a kitchen sponge were lodged inside this young woman's stomach and were expanding. Her trafficker had forced her to put the kitchen sponge inside her body to ensure she could continue to be raped by the men who bought even during her menstruation. An immediate medical procedure took place to remove these foreign objects from her body. Had we not been able to assist our young client in receiving medical care, the doctor told us that she could have died. This young woman told us that she begged her trafficker repeatedly to allow her to go to the doctor but he had refused to take her and punished her for asking by not feeding her for almost two days.

In another case, a young victim of sex trafficking attempted to escape her trafficker by running away to a medical clinic. While there, she was afraid to speak about her situation and did not know how to convey her needs in English. She was found by her trafficker who forced her back to the apartment and told her that he would "make an example out of her" before he beat her in front of the other girls enslaved in the apartment.

Upon meeting with FAIR Girls staff, most of our clients request immediate access to medical care. Most have been denied any medical attention and have serious concerns about their health. FAIR Girls utilizes an array of free and low-cost medical clinics where our clients can be screened for any and all medical concerns, including reproductive health concerns. These appointments are often the first form of medical attention our clients have had access to since their captivity as trafficking victims.

Victims of forced labor trafficking also need medical attention for harm as a result of hazardous labor, long hours, and in some cases sexual abuse and rape by their traffickers

Victims of forced labor trafficking endure long and arduous hours of labor. In some cases, their work may also be dangerous and harmful to their health. Many victims of forced labor trafficking suffer from injuries that go untreated and become infected or lead to other serious medical situations. Victims of forced labor trafficking are often subject to rape and sexual abuse in addition to being forced to work. Their traffickers exert total control over every aspect of their lives and tell them that medical professionals will not provide services to them without proper legal documentation and may even call the police to have them deported. Just as victims of sex trafficking, they are often isolated from any form of social support and are subject to extreme depression and anxiety.

In the case of one young woman who was forced to work in a restaurant for two years, her trafficker beat her with a kitchen prong when she began to fall asleep while working. The beatings took place regularly and the young woman lost count of the number of times she was beaten and sexually assaulted by her employer. The beatings left long and bloody welts across her arms and back which caused her constant shame, contributed to her exhaustion, and resulted in extreme pain. She was never provided any medical attention, not even a Band-Aid. In order to hide these welts, she was forced to wear long sleeves and was seldom given new or clean clothing. After coming to FAIR Girls, local staff noticed that she held her arms and had severe discoloring of the skin. We offered to take her to a local medical clinic to have a comprehensive examination. Initially, she was terrified of going to a doctor because she believed she would be deported, but after several reassurances, she agreed to go.

Upon examination, the doctors discovered that the fabric from the clothing had become embedded into her arms and back along with other dirt and food. As a result, her arm was severely damaged and suffered from an infection that led to gangrene. Ultimately, her arm had to be amputated but she was able to live. She also suffered from two sexually transmitted diseases.

Service providers for victims of trafficking are there to restore the dignity and freedom of their clients

The survivors of human trafficking with whom FAIR Girls comes into contact are often unfamiliar with the local community as well as how to access services and understand their medical rights. As service providers, it is our responsibility not only to ensure our clients receive the medical attention and referrals they request but also to educate them on how to access medical services, including reproductive and sexual health needs, on their own in the future.

The goal of providing social services is to help each victim take steps to regaining control over their life. Case managers and social service providers aim to assist each client in gaining skills in advocating for themselves and regaining self-sufficiency. The medical clinics and community health facilities to which FAIR Girls refers our clients are diverse in their services and often have multi-lingual and culturally competent staff who can provide not only emergency services but high quality preventative care, screening, and additional counseling. Their care and sensitivity helps rebuild the lack of trust that many clients suffer as a result of the physical and emotional abuse they endured as victims of forced labor and sex trafficking.

Victims learn that contrary to the lies told to them by their traffickers, they will not be punished, arrested, or deported by medical staff and that they are not to blame for the abuse, torture, and rape that they may have endured. Many clients establish long-term and lasting relationships with the medical clinic staff that then can provide them with the ongoing care they need to rebuild their life. In the case of two trafficked sisters, one young woman continued to see the doctor at the local community health clinic long after she escaped trafficking and overcame the four STDs and depression she endured. Two years following her escape, this young woman utilized these medical services to gain access to reproductive health services and ultimately delivered her first child with the support of this clinic.

In 2009, a client came to FAIR Girls after escaping her trafficker who had forced her to have sex with what she estimated was 1,200 to 1,300 men during a one year period. She reported that the men who raped her were from all backgrounds, including businessmen, politicians, college students, and married men. Our client was terrified to go to a doctor because she feared that she was pregnant or had HIV/AIDS. She felt that her life was over and told us that she no longer wished to live. There were cut marks on her arms from previous suicide attempts. She would not look any of us in the eyes when talking about her exploitation and enslavement in hotels across the D.C. metro area. We told her over and over again that it was not her fault and after some days, she decided she had to know if she sick or pregnant by one of her rapists or trafficker. We selected a known medical facility that specializes in low income and immigrant patients and went with her to the doctor. We waited in the reception area while she was assessed, tested, and given initial consultation. She was devastated to learn that she had three sexually transmitted diseases.

In closing, I would like to make the following recommendations in regards to providing comprehensive medical services for victims of human trafficking:

Recommendations:

1. Services for victims of trafficking must be provided in compassionate and culturally sensitive ways to ensure that victims feel respected, safe, and understand the services being provided to them;
2. All victims of trafficking must be offered a full range of services, including reproductive and sexual health services, when and how they request them;
3. Medical services for all victims of human trafficking must be offered without hindrance to ensure the physical and emotional well being of every client.

Organizations that are funded by the federal government to serve victims of human trafficking must do so by protecting the rights of each victim and by focusing on a full and comprehensive recovery. The Health and Human Services (HHS) decision to ensure that referrals to family planning services is a part of the comprehensive list of services a grant-receiving agency must provide is the right decision. The only way to fully restore the dignity and freedom of a trafficked person is to offer them the support and services they have been denied by their trafficker. Human trafficking is about enslavement and it is the denial of basic human dignities, freedoms and human rights. No one should be enslaved in modern day America, but human trafficking exists all around us. Our work as social service providers is about giving our clients the knowledge and skills they need to regain their freedom.

I would like to thank you again for giving me the chance to speak with you today. I will be happy to answer any questions.

FAIR Girls Client Case Studies:

FAIR Girls provides support and resources to help girls avoid and escape trafficking in communities throughout the world. Names have been changed to protect their identities.

Jasmine (*Washington, D.C.*)

At age 16, Jasmine had seen first hand the harsh world of commercial sexual exploitation. As a foster child with few friends, Jasmine felt lonely and unsure where her life would end up. One night, as she was walking to the foster group home, a man pulled up in his car and offered her money for sex. Jasmine said no, but he grabbed her, forced her into the car, and then forced her to have sex with up to 10 men a night. In a law enforcement sting, Jasmine was arrested as an adult, but after law enforcement called FAIR Girls, it was discovered she was an exploited child. Through FAIR Girls, Jasmine was able to find a place to stay and has benefited from the art therapy, social support, and income she gains from the JewelGirls program. She is looking forward to graduating high school and going to college. She is currently taking business education classes and hopes to own her own accounting firm in the future.

Angela (*Chicago, IL*)

Angela believed the older boy who offered her a ride to school really liked her. At 17, Angela never thought he would sell her on Craigslist, force her to have sex 10 times a night in hotel rooms in six cities across the United States, and beat her with belts and chains when she didn't earn enough money. A local DC hospital called FAIR Fund when Angela escaped her trafficker and was found by a nurse. FAIR Girls helped Angela find immediate shelter, food, and worked to secure long term medical and legal support for her. One year later, Angela is enrolled in college, has a job, and lives in her own apartment.

Agnes (*Kampala, Uganda*)

Agnes has spent much of her young life trying to survive as a street child in Uganda. After her parents died from what she thinks was AIDS, she began to beg on the streets and was lured by a local woman into her house to work as a domestic helper. She was not allowed to go to school and never saw a penny of the money she earned. Agnes eventually ran away and was found by a local outreach team who had recently partnered with FAIR Girls to assist trafficked and high-risk girls. In May 2009, Agnes joined JewelGirls, where she learns alongside other girls to create handmade paper beads in the tradition of Ugandan art. Agnes now earns her own income through JewelGirls and wants to be self-sufficient and have her own family. She loves working with the color pink, attending the life-skills workshops, and works six hours per week on her art.

Marina (*Moscow, Russia*)

Marina had spent her entire life in a Russian orphanage until she was pushed out at age 17. She had nowhere to go, and with no knowledge of how to take care of herself, find a job, or pay bills, Marina feared she would have no choice but to turn to prostitution to stay alive. Marina joined FAIR Girls' Moscow-based program where she has learned job skills and strategies to stay safe

from potential forms of human trafficking such as exploitative jobs and false marriages. Marina is an excellent jewelry designer and she loves working with black glass and red amber. Marina is currently enrolled in hairdressing school. She says she is saving the money she earns from JewelGirls to start her own hairdressing business.

Trisha (*Washington, D.C.*)

When she was 17, Trisha's aunt invited her to come live with her in Washington, D.C. After leaving her hometown in the small Caribbean village where she had grown up, Trisha was taken to an area of the District where there were many fancy houses. Instead of being allowed to go to school as she was promised, Trisha was forced to work 18-hour days cleaning and caring for elderly people. Her aunt took all of her money and threatened her with beatings and deportation. After one year of forced domestic servitude and abuse, Trisha managed to run away after hearing about a local youth home that put her in touch with FAIR Girls. Trisha needed shelter, counseling, and legal support. She was very determined to better her life and be free from her aunt. Within days of coming to FAIR Girls, Trisha enrolled in math and English classes that would help her get a better job one day. She almost never misses a workshop and welcomes new girls into our JewelGirls program as if she is an older sister. She is a skilled jewelry designer and devoted writer. She hopes someday to have a job where she can help others the way that she says she has been helped.

Anya (*Moscow, Russia*)

Anya is 12 years old and was sent to live in a state shelter for trafficked children in Russia after authorities found her forced to beg on the streets. She came to the program so malnourished that many people thought she was only 8 or 9 years old – not 12. Her alcoholic mother had a history of neglecting and abusing Anya, and she refused to accept going back to live with her. After coming to the shelter, Anya quickly joined FAIR Girls' program, JewelGirls, where she began to learn how to read, write, count, and express her talents in jewelry-making. In each of the weekly four-hour workshops, Anya receives individual care and attention and a chance to talk about her challenges and plan for her future now that she is free from her traffickers. Anya attends JewelGirls sales parties all over Moscow, which is very exciting for her. In the spring, she visited the U.S. Embassy with the FAIR Girls team and decided she wants to learn English and become a teacher. Anya is full of hope for her future and loves to create very elaborate designs that represent her cheerful personality.

Andrea C. Powell
Co-founder & Executive Director
FAIR Girls

Biography:

Andrea Powell (Executive Director) co-founded FAIR Girls in 2003 and currently serves as Executive Director. For the past 8 years, Andrea has led FAIR Girls' efforts to prevent the trafficking of girls in the United States and in FAIR Girls' global programs in Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Russia, and Uganda.

In her current position at FAIR Girls, Andrea over-sees all operational, programmatic, and developmental aspects of FAIR Girls. Andrea currently serves as the FAIR Girls' chief liaison to the D.C. Anti Trafficking Task Force and has trained hundreds of U.S. and international audiences, including federal and local law enforcement, service providers, state and federal policy makers, teachers, how to identify and assist child victims of sex and forced labor trafficking.

In 2009, Ms. Powell served as co-investigator to a Department of Justice funded study on commercial sexual exploitation of children in the United States. Ms. Powell currently acts as an adjunct professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. Her efforts to stop the trafficking of youth have been featured in media outlets including CNN, the BBC, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, the Wall Street Journal, and Voice of America.