



**Written Testimony of Catherine Glenn Foster, Esq.
President & CEO, First Rights Global
In Support of S.235
Submitted to the South Carolina Senate Judiciary Subcommittee
February 26, 2025**

Dear Chairman Adams and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.235, and for your consideration in allowing for video testimony to allow our survivors — and those of us stuck up in DC today! — to testify. My name is Catherine Glenn Foster, and I serve as President and CEO of First Rights Global, headquartered in Columbia. I am a constitutional attorney, a mother, and an advocate for the vulnerable. Throughout my career, I have worked to defend those who are exploited and marginalized, and today, I am here to speak on the urgent need for stronger laws to combat the ever-expanding impact of human trafficking in South Carolina.

Human trafficking is not just a crisis happening somewhere else—it is happening here, in our communities. South Carolina faces a staggering reality: sex trafficking in our state is a \$250-500 million-a-year business, impacting thousands of lives every single day. This is not an underground, disorganized operation. Really, it's more an industry than a business. It's not what we see on TV: autonomous prostitutes standing on street corners offering sex at a price. Instead, it is a sophisticated, highly profitable criminal enterprise that preys on the most vulnerable members of our society.

This criminal enterprise, like every other industry in this state, has products, buyers, sellers, transportation, infrastructure, marketing, recruitment, retention, and disposal. But unlike legal industries, this one does not trade in goods or services—it trades in human life itself. Traffickers lure often teenage or even pre-teen victims from the safety of their homes and communities through fraud, force, and coercion, manipulating them into a cycle of exploitation, trapping them in leveraged drug dependence, extreme violence and rape, and abject slavery: hell on earth.

Victims are often recruited as minors, lured in by false promises of security, love, or opportunity. Others are targeted because of financial desperation, addiction, or instability in their home lives. Once in the system, escape is nearly impossible without outside intervention. The traffickers know this, and they operate with impunity because the demand for commercial sex fuels the supply.

That is why S.235 is so critical. It is not just another law—it is a necessary tool to attack this industry at its root. We cannot effectively fight trafficking unless we target demand.

For too long, the buyers—those who pay for sex—have faced only minor penalties, often no more than a \$200 fine. This allows traffickers to continue profiting while buyers walk away with little more than a slap on the wrist. S.235 changes that. It raises the penalty for purchasing sex from a misdemeanor to a Class F felony, with up to five years in jail and up to a \$1,000 fine.

This is not simply about punishment—it is about deterrence, teaching that actions have consequences. When states take demand seriously, trafficking numbers drop. Texas and North Carolina have already passed similar legislation, and the results speak for themselves. We must follow their lead and send a clear message: South Carolina will not be a safe haven for those who exploit human beings for profit, treat human life as a commodity, or commit violence against some of the most vulnerable South Carolinians.

This bill also aligns with the Nordic Model, which has been successfully implemented in countries like Sweden, Norway, and Canada. The Nordic Model does not criminalize trafficking victims—it shifts the legal burden onto the buyers and traffickers, the true perpetrators of this crime. When the demand is reduced, the industry collapses.

Opponents may argue that harsher penalties for sex buyers will not stop trafficking. But history tells us otherwise. Where buyers face real consequences, demand decreases, and fewer women and children are exploited. This is simple economics—when the cost of buying sex increases, fewer people will take the risk.

Some may also claim that prostitution is a victimless crime. But the truth is, the vast majority of those in prostitution are not there by choice. Over 90% of women in prostitution report being trafficked or forced into the sex trade by circumstances beyond their control. Many have been groomed since childhood, assaulted, and stripped of their autonomy. They are not criminals—they are victims, and our laws must reflect that reality.

S.235 is not just a bill—it is a moral imperative. By taking a stand against demand, we are protecting the most vulnerable and refusing to allow human life to be bought, sold, and discarded.

The price of a human life must never be measured by the hour. The time to act is now. I urge this committee to vote favorably on this bill and send it to the full Judiciary Committee. South Carolina must not wait any longer to take meaningful action against human trafficking.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

Catherine Glenn Foster, M.A., J.D.
President & CEO
First Rights Global