



# **U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking**

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*Ending Slavery Is Everyone's Work*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **USCSAHT Supports the Equality Model Approach to Prostitution**

ST. LOUIS: As people throughout the United States prepare to celebrate Independence Day this weekend, we are reminded of the many people in our own communities and throughout the world who are still not free due to the global crime of human trafficking. U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT) is a collaborative, faith-based national network that offers education, supports access to survivor services, and engages in advocacy in order to eradicate human trafficking and ensure that all are free to pursue their dreams.

The month of July also ends with the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons (July 30), and the theme this year is “Victims’ Voices Lead the Way,” reminding us that the most important voices in directing anti-trafficking work and initiatives in our communities must come from victims and survivors of human trafficking. The anti-trafficking efforts of USCSAHT reflect the core values of our faith centered in the dignity of every person, and we seek to center and prioritize the experiences of survivors in our work, listening carefully to their recommendations for what will be most helpful in truly ending human trafficking and providing the needed resources for survivors to thrive.

When it comes to the issue of prostitution and how to best prevent human trafficking, there are a variety of opinions and strategies. After careful reflection and discernment on the various approaches available, including listening to the recommendations of survivors of human trafficking, the USCSAHT Board of Directors has decided to take a public stance in favor of the Equality Model (also known as the Nordic Model or partial decriminalization) and against full decriminalization and legalization of prostitution.

Jennifer Reyes Lay, Executive Director of USCSAHT said, *“I am proud of the intentional and deliberate process that the Board underwent to arrive at this decision, which was rooted in our values and our accountability to survivors of human trafficking. Going forward, I welcome collaboration with other like-minded groups, individuals, and elected officials to prevent the expansion of human trafficking and support all survivors through the comprehensive approach offered by the Equality Model.”*



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There are three main components of the Equality Model: 1) Decriminalize those who are prostituted or trafficked; 2) Provide support to those who seek to exit prostitution; and 3) Prosecute pimps, brothel owners, and buyers. In addition to the third point about prosecution, USCSAHT supports a restorative justice approach to working with those who have been arrested and charged with these crimes. We believe in promoting rehabilitation over incarceration whenever possible in order to address the root causes of the harm being perpetuated and prevent this behavior from continuing.

The USCSAHT Board decided to support the Equality Model because it is the model most survivor-advocates are proposing and is most in line with our values. This decision is based on a recognition that prostitution is inherently harmful and violent, and therefore a violation of human rights. This approach promotes a socio-economic system that prioritizes gender equality, aspires to economic equity, and recognizes the government's responsibility to provide comprehensive services to victims. The Equality Model is key because it puts survivors and their needs first. Partial decriminalization minimizes the opportunity for traffickers to target the vulnerable and prioritizes community programs designed to prevent exploitation from happening.

Theresa Flores, Program Director for USCSAHT and a survivor of human trafficking said, *"I support the Equality Model because it views the woman (seller) as a victim and not the criminal and yet goes after the Demand for Sex for Sale. Which is the only true way to finally end human trafficking once and for all."*

USCSAHT believes that full decriminalization and/or legalization of commercial sex acts normalizes the practice, which leads to increased demand. Research shows that whenever the sex trade is fully decriminalized, the demand for commercial sex acts increases as does human trafficking in order to meet the increased demand. On average, countries and cities where prostitution is currently legal experience larger reported human trafficking inflows. Our commitment and accountability is to survivors of human trafficking, and any position that increases the likelihood of human trafficking must be opposed.

In taking this public stance in support of the Equality Model, we are committing to: 1) Supporting proposals and legislation based on the Equality Model around the country; 2) Opposing proposals and legislation to fully decriminalize or legalize prostitution; 3) Following the lead of survivor-advocates on solutions to prevent human trafficking and provide needed resources for survivors to thrive; 4) Holding buyers, traffickers, and brothel owners accountable for their harmful actions and promoting policies/programs that favor restorative justice and rehabilitation; and 5) Partnering with other organizations and coalitions that support the Equality Model.

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