

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 1, 2023

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 South Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Kathleen Passidomo  
President  
Florida Senate  
404 South Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Lauren Book  
Minority Leader  
Florida Senate  
404 South Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Paul Renner  
Speaker  
Florida House of Representatives  
402 South Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Fentrice Driskell  
Minority Leader  
Florida House of Representatives  
402 South Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis, President Passidomo, Speaker Renner, Minority Leader Book, and  
Minority Leader Driskell,

We are writing to express our deep concern about the recent reports of sex trafficking of foster children and a thriving sex trade in Florida hotels, as reported in recent articles in the Sun Sentinel newspaper. We can only imagine you are just as concerned as we are, so we write to urge Florida officials to take immediate action to address this issue.

As you should know, foster children are among the most vulnerable members of our society, and they deserve our utmost protection and care. The fact that they are being exploited and abused in this way is a grave injustice, and it is imperative that we do everything in our power to bring those responsible to justice and prevent further incidents with a change in Florida's foster care system.

In 2018, Congress passed the Family First Prevention Services Act, which informed states that the federal government will only fund two weeks of group home care for foster children, with an exception for trafficking victims. Florida changed its policy in 2020 to take advantage of this exception by creating a broad term definition for children who are at risk of being trafficked.

According to Florida Children's First, a children's advocacy group, the definition is so broad it could apply to more than half of the state's foster kids. Over the course of four years the number of group homes in Florida that are now considered to serve children who are at risk of trafficking has increased from 4 to 150. This significant increase is most likely contributing to the Florida

foster care system pipeline for trafficking. **We urge you to take immediate action to refine the definition of "at-risk for trafficking" in order to reduce the number of group homes and ensure that children are placed in appropriate and safe placements.**

Also reported by the Sun Sentinel, hotels in Florida are committing violations in huge numbers of *HB 851-Human Trafficking*, a law passed in the 2019 Florida state legislative session. That law is intended to combat sex trafficking in hotels by creating human trafficking awareness training and policies for public lodging establishments and imposing \$2,000 fines for establishments not in compliance with the law. Alarming, the Sun Sentinel revealed that more than 6,600 hotels and rental properties have received more than 14,000 citations for violating State human trafficking laws since 2019. Although thousands of citations have been issued, hotels have been able to circumvent the fines by taking so-called remedial actions to address the citations. Yet, the scourge continues. **Investigation and action should be taken against any individuals or organizations that may be complicit in these crimes, including hotel staff, foster care providers, and other stakeholders. And importantly, *HB 851-Human Trafficking* should be scrutinized for appropriate fixes.**

**We urge the DeSantis administration and state legislators to work closely with local law enforcement, child welfare agencies, and advocacy groups to investigate these reports and develop a comprehensive plan to address this issue. This may include increased funding for investigative and enforcement efforts, more robust protections, and support for foster children, including family-based care options and legislative fixes including those previously mentioned.**

Finally, in short, we strongly urge you to take swift and decisive action to protect the foster children of Florida from further harm. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

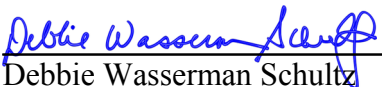
Sincerely,



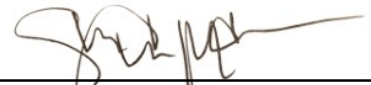
Lois Frankel  
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick  
Member of Congress

*Kathy Castor*

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Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

*Maxwell Frost*

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Maxwell Frost  
Member of Congress

*Darren Soto*

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Darren Soto  
Member of Congress

*Jared Moskowitz*

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Jared Moskowitz  
Member of Congress

Cc:

Attorney General of Florida  
Florida Department of Children and Families  
Florida Department of Juvenile Justice  
Florida Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Criminal Justice  
Florida Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs  
Florida Senate Committee on Criminal Justice  
Florida House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Criminal Justice  
Florida House Judiciary Committee  
American Children's Campaign  
Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center  
Florida Alliance to End Human Trafficking  
Florida Coalition for Children  
Florida's Children First  
Florida Foster and Adoptive Parent Association  
Guardian ad Litem Office  
Kristi House  
One Voice Impact  
PACE Center for Girls  
US Institute Against Human Trafficking  
Voices for Florida