

May 7, 2009 - Senate Bill 69 Expands Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting

The following press release was issued by the Governor's Office of Children and Families:

Governor Perdue signs Senate Bill 69- Expands Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting, Including Suspected Instances of Prostituted Children

ATLANTA (May 5, 2009) – Having sex, knowingly or unknowingly, with an underage prostitute is child abuse, and legislation signed by Gov. Sonny Perdue today ensures mandatory child abuse reporters must report victims of sexual exploitation in all cases – not just those instances where a “parent or caretaker” is suspected.

Until now, Georgia law has restricted mandatory reporting only to suspected cases of child abuse that involve “parents or caretakers.” Senate Bill 69, sponsored by Senator Renee Unterman, passed the Georgia House of Representatives on March 26 by a vote of 163-1. It requires mandatory reporters to report child abuse at the hands of any exploiter. Advocates working to stop the prostitution of children in Georgia say the broader language means clients – who typically aren't family members or caretakers of the victim – will now also be reported as child abusers. “What a victory for the children of Georgia”, says Mary Frances Bowley, director of the non-profit Wellspring Living for Girls. “Now there is an avenue for those who work closely with children to direct them to safety and restoration.”

“Child sexual abuse is abuse no matter who commits it. This law will tremendously support many of Georgia's most forgotten adolescent girls whose victimization often goes unreported because few people recognize their situation as abuse at the hands of criminals.” says Kaffie McCullough, campaign director for *A Future. Not A Past.*, a statewide campaign to stop the prostitution of children in Georgia.

Georgia has some of the nation's toughest laws to punish criminals convicted of prostituting children and human trafficking. Under Georgia law, those convicted of soliciting sex from or pimping a child younger than 18 can be sentenced to five to 20 years in prison, plus asset forfeiture under state pandering statutes, or 10 to 20 years in prison under the state's human-trafficking laws.

The sexual exploitation of children in Georgia is becoming of increasing public concern as more credible information emerges about the issue. Research commissioned by *A Future. Not A Past.* finds between 200 and 300 adolescent girls are prostituted each month in Georgia on the streets; over the Internet; through escort services; and in major hotels. “The sexual exploitation of Georgia's children is too prevalent and too devastating to its victims for us not to act. Hopefully, the legislation signed today will set Georgia on a course to reduce greatly the number of its children who are victims of this type of abuse,” says Heather Ewing, President of the Junior League of Atlanta, which was an advocacy partner in passing the legislation.

“While it will be important for mandatory reporters to be aware of this new law, everyday citizens should also be aware of this potential abuse in their communities,” says Jen Bennecke, Director of the Governor's Office for Children and Families (GOCF). The Office is coordinating a state task force to develop trainings for mandatory reporters as a response to the new legislation. Also, an additional \$991,680 was appropriated to the GOCF FY10 budget to support victims of child prostitution and trafficking. “We all have an obligation to protect Georgia's children from abuse and neglect.”

For information about reporting suspected abuse, call Prevent Child Abuse Georgia's HELPLINE toll-free within the state of Georgia at 1-800-CHILDREN or out of state at (404) 870-6580. The information you share and your identity will remain confidential. For more information about efforts to stop the prostitution of children in Georgia, visit

www.afuturenotapast.org

Mandatory Reporters According to Georgia Law

- Physicians, interns, residents
- Hospital or medical personnel
- Dentists
- Licensed Psychologists, persons participating in internships to obtain licensure
- Podiatrists
- Registered professional nurses, licenses practical nurses
- Professional counselors, social workers, marriage and family therapists
- School teachers and school administrators
- School guidance counselors, visiting teachers, school social workers, school psychologists
- Child welfare agency personnel, child service organization personnel
- Child counseling personnel

- Law enforcement personnel