



## CHILD WELFARE AND DOMESTIC CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

### WHAT IS DOMESTIC CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING?

**Domestic Child Sex Trafficking (DCST)** occurs any time a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident under the age of 18 exchanges sex for anything of value (e.g., food, shelter, money, etc.).<sup>i</sup>

### WHAT MAKES A YOUTH VULNERABLE TO TRAFFICKING?

The following factors make youth vulnerable to sex trafficking and exploitation:<sup>ii</sup>

- A history of sexual and/or physical abuse
- Community or family instability and dislocation
- Child welfare involvement, especially out-of-home foster care placement
- Being a runaway or homeless youth
- Disconnection from the education system and being off-track for achievement
- Poverty

### WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILD WELFARE AND DCST?

Current data suggests that many sex trafficked youth in the United States have a history of child welfare involvement:

- In Illinois, a 2016 study revealed that nearly two-thirds of children believed to be trafficking victims had a history of child maltreatment and child welfare involvement.<sup>iii</sup>
- Since launching its first responder protocol in 2015, Los Angeles county found that 85% of identified child sex trafficking survivors had prior child welfare involvement.<sup>iv</sup>
- In 2018, Connecticut identified 210 child sex trafficking victims, of which approximately 28% were child welfare involved.<sup>v</sup>
- In Hawaii, a 2020 study revealed that nearly one out of five sex trafficking victims reported being in foster care as a child.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> As defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, DCST is the “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” where the victim is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident under the age of 18. 22 U.S.C. §§ 7102(9)-(10). A commercial sex act is defined as “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.” § 7102(4).

<sup>ii</sup> Kate Walker, California Child Welfare Council, [Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California](#) (2013), pp.18-20.

<sup>iii</sup> Debra Schilling Wolfe, Social Work Today: [Foster Care Youths at Risk for Child Sex Trafficking](#) (2016).

<sup>iv</sup> My News LA.com, “[L.A. County Officials Highlight Success of Fight Against Sex Trafficking](#)” (November 13, 2018).

<sup>v</sup> Connecticut State Department of Children and Families, The Human Anti-trafficking Response Team, [HART Helps](#) (Spring 2019), pp.2-3.

<sup>vi</sup> Dominique Roe-Sepowitz and Khara Jabola-Carolus, ASU School of Social Work, [Sex Trafficking in Hawai‘i: Part III](#) (January 2020), p. 31.