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| **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:**[Megan Taylor](mailto:Megan_Taylor@heller.senate.gov) |
| October 22, 2018 | 202-224-6244 |

**Heller Introduces Bill to Strengthen Protections for Child Trafficking Victims**

**WASHINGTON –**U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) has introduced the Protecting Child Trafficking Victim Witnesses Act, legislation that works to ensure children who are the victims of human trafficking are afforded the same protections that other child abuse victims are in court.

While our country has made strides in the fight against child trafficking, victims are still sometimes viewed as criminals by those who do not understand the complexities of this despicable crime. This distorted view can lead to victims not being granted certain protections that prevent re-traumatization afforded to other child victim witnesses. The child’s statement is a critical tool for the prosecution, as it helps the court fully understand the trafficking scheme.

That is why Heller authored the Protecting Child Trafficking Victim Witnesses Act, legislation that provides resources to establish victim-centered protocols to strengthen protections for child trafficking victims testifying against their trafficker. These protections can include the opportunity to testify via Closed Circuit Television or videotaped deposition as well as limiting the number of individuals present during the child’s testimony. These protections can also include providing a child with a victim witness advocate who is there to support the minor and ensure they have access to the necessary services.

“Trafficking victims are victims, not criminals, and it is critical that this is understood by society and throughout our systems,” **said Heller**. “As we work to rid our state, country, and world of the heinous crime of human trafficking, we must protect its victims. When a child trafficking victim is testifying against their trafficker, they must be treated like every other child victim witness. Our court system can and should prioritize the safety and well-being of these victims while delivering justice.”

Heller has championed several policies that protect victims of violent crimes, including the [Justice Served Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=pressreleases&id=10AAE10A-06E9-40FD-B9D0-D86D8770D1AE), which was recently signed into law. The Justice Served Act authorizes federal funding under the Debbie Smith Act, to prosecute the rape kit backlog, resolve cold cases, and help exonerate those who were wrongfully convicted. [Heller is a co-author of the Debbie Smith Crime Victims Protection Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2018/3/heller-cornyn-feinstein-klobuchar-introduce-the-debbie-smith-crime-victims-protection-act), legislation to continue the program’s testing of DNA evidence and ensure that Nevada receives critical funding to help reduce the backlog of DNA evidence. A full background on Heller’s efforts to empower victims of crimes can be found below.

**Background** **on Sen. Heller’s additional efforts to empower victims of crimes**:

* Heller co-authored the [Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Reporting (SAFER) Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=AC843F36-1234-4CB6-BC03-173239BDD647), bipartisan legislation designed[to assist law enforcement in their efforts to reduce the nation’s rape kit backlog](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=AC843F36-1234-4CB6-BC03-173239BDD647). It was signed into law on January 8, 2018.
* Heller authored the [HERO Improvements Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/9/heller-effort-to-empower-veterans-to-fight-human-trafficking-in-nevada-passes-senate), [legislation to help train disabled military veterans to fight cybercrime](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/9/heller-effort-to-empower-veterans-to-fight-human-trafficking-in-nevada-passes-senate). It unanimously passed the U.S. Senate as part of a larger anti-human trafficking proposal, the bipartisan Abolish Human Trafficking Act.
* Heller co-authored the [Abolish Human Trafficking Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=AF675B46-1126-41E8-A51B-E54C48674A8C), a bipartisan bill aimed at cracking down on the horrific crime of human trafficking. The legislation funds services for victims and law enforcement, increases penalties for perpetrators, and encourages stronger reporting to track human trafficking crimes.
* Heller co-authored the [Debbie Smith Crime Victims Protection Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2018/3/heller-cornyn-feinstein-klobuchar-introduce-the-debbie-smith-crime-victims-protection-act),legislation to reauthorize the Debbie Smith Actand dedicate much-needed resources to state and local law enforcement agencies to conduct forensic analyses of crime scenes, including untested rape kits.
* In 2015, he supported the landmark Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, signed into law by President Obama, which included [his amendment to ensure DHS personnel are prepared to better identify victims and perpetrators of human trafficking](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2015/4/heller-s-amendment-seeking-justice-for-victims-of-human-trafficking-passes-senate).
* Heller cosponsored the [Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA),](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=A85FBCCD-3D90-4E8E-BB33-AD616B276157) legislation that will help end online sex trafficking in [Nevada, which ranks 9th in the U.S. among reported human trafficking cases](https://humantraffickinghotline.org/states). [The president signed this legislation into law on April 9, 2018](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=A85FBCCD-3D90-4E8E-BB33-AD616B276157).
* Heller cosponsored the [Combating Human Trafficking in Commercial Vehicles Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=AF675B46-1126-41E8-A51B-E54C48674A8C), legislation that requires the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation to designate an individual tasked with coordinating human trafficking prevention efforts within the federal agency and further increases support to educate commercial drivers on how to recognize and prevent human trafficking. [It was signed into law on January 4, 2018](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=AF675B46-1126-41E8-A51B-E54C48674A8C).

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