

## Girls Courts

### I. Overview

- Girls Courts are specialty courts designed to address the gender-specific needs of young women. They follow atypical court models and emphasize the provision of services and rehabilitation over conviction.
- The first Girls Court commenced in Hawaii in 2004. Since then, about a dozen Girls Courts have been started in California, Texas, Florida, New York, Michigan, and New Mexico.
- Girls Courts represent a shift in thinking about the way our juvenile courts should serve girls and about the way prostitution should be addressed.

### II. Significance to Sex Trafficking

- Prosecuting traffickers alone will not solve the trafficking problem—victims must be given the services and skills necessary to rebuild their lives.
- Current legislation is lacking in victim assistance laws and even ideal victim assistance laws may not be an effective means to rehabilitate trafficking victims.
- As a treatment court that emphasizes mental health, family, and substance abuse counseling, Girls Courts are ideal settings for trafficking victims to recover from trauma and learn skills to prosper on their own.
- Some Girls Courts also function as diversion programs. These Courts flag young women who are at a high risk for being trafficked and provide services in the hopes that they can prevent the girl from being trafficked. High-risk girls may come from dysfunctional homes, have a history of abuse, use narcotics, or attempt to runaway.
- Girls Courts can better serve female trafficking victims than juvenile courts because Girls Courts can facilitate female-specific reactions to trauma, such as fear of men and lack of control, better than juvenile courts, which were designed with male delinquents in mind.
- Because Girls Courts integrate treatment to one docket and one team, they prevent the isolation of attorneys and agencies that can be a barrier to comprehensive victim assistance and that otherwise occurs when girls' charges or issues are addressed in more than one system or docket.

### III. Outlook

- Iowa is set to open its first Girls Court, "Too Good To Lose," in March 2016.
- Too Good To Lose will start as a gender-specific program for young women as an outgrowth of Polk County's juvenile drug court.
- Early studies show that Girls Courts have been successful in helping sexually exploited girls leave "the life" and become productive members of society, with fewer law violations, runaway attempts, and shelter admissions following graduation.
- Too Good To Lose includes many of the components of already existing Girls Courts that have facilitated their success.