

Friday, August 9, 2013

Human Trafficking Victim Becomes First To Have Record Erased



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COLUMBUS, Ohio - It has been five years since Julie Hatfield has walked the streets of Columbus, forced to sell herself to strangers. But her criminal record has followed her.

On Friday, she finally stepped out of the long shadow of her past.

Hatfield is the first person under Ohio's Human Trafficking law to request that the criminal record of her darkest days be erased.

"I was under a gang of people, a certain gang of people," she testified in Franklin County Municipal Court. "If I didn't go make them money, I would be beaten."

The streets of south Columbus is where she made that money. Selling her body to strangers is how she did it. But she says it was never her choice.

Along with violence, she says her traffickers used drugs and deception to control her.

Before long, her own shame and guilt became their accomplices.

"Your mind is distorted. You have no hope," she said. "You're so degraded that you feel like you mean nothing, that your life is worthless, that you don't want to live, you know? You feel like you actually deserve to die."

Under a law signed by Gov. John Kasich last summer, trafficking victims now have a chance at a literal clean slate.

"The law now provides that those records will be destroyed. That means physically destroyed paper. That means erased from any databases or hard drives," said Judge Paul Herbert.

Friday, Herbert said he was convinced Julie Hatfield met the criteria:

"...That during all these years you were under the control of forces that compelled you to engage in activities that you otherwise would not have. You don't have any record prior to that, and you don't

have any record in the five years since that time. So therefore I want to let you know that I'm going to expunge each and every one of your prior convictions. Congratulations."

Hatfield walked out of the courthouse a truly free woman, with message to those trapped like she once was.

"You don't have to live that way. There really is hope. There's people that care for you. You don't have to live in that shame or guilt anymore."

Kasich released a statement Friday saying "human trafficking victims don't deserve to be treated as criminals, but deserve our compassion and support to they can retake control of their lives."

<http://www.10tv.com/content/stories/2013/08/09/columbus-human-trafficking-victim-record-erased.html>

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