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## **The National Organization for Women – New York Hails Passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act**

### ***New York State Assembly Pushes Key Package of Legislation Forward for Women and Girls***

March 16, 2015 – Albany, New York – Today, the New York State Assembly passed a slate of measures to strengthen the state’s human trafficking laws, including the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act (TVPJA). The comprehensive package of legislation aims to hold traffickers accountable, strengthen New York’s response, and empower survivors.

NOW New York President Sonia Ossorio said, “We applaud Speaker Heastie and the Assembly for ushering in a new era in New York. Trafficking affects thousands of our most vulnerable. With the passage of this critical legislation, New York is on a path to be a leader in the fight against this modern day slavery.”

Women and girls constitute a majority of all trafficking victims, and it is estimated that more than 80% of sex trafficking victims are female and more than half are children. The groups that are at highest risk for trafficking include runaway youth, children with histories of abuse, LGBTQ youth, girls of color, and immigrants. The U.S. Department of Justice has named New York State as a major hub for human trafficking, and the National Human Trafficking Resource Hotline reports New York as one of the top four states from which it receives reports of trafficking.

The package of measures includes legislation that will expand safe housing services for victims, create a hotline for reporting human trafficking, and provide training to employees of gaming facilities on human trafficking. TVPJA, sponsored by Assemblymember Amy Paulin and State Senator Andrew Lanza, will strengthen New York’s current anti-human trafficking laws by:

- Creating the crime of aggravated patronizing of a minor, which will put the crime of buying a minor for sex on par with current statutory rape penalties;
- Increasing penalties for sex and labor trafficking;
- Removing stigmatizing language in the penal code by replacing “prostitute” with “person in prostitution”;
- Allowing victims to take civil action against their traffickers;
- Establishing an affirmative defense for trafficking victims (ensuring defense attorneys are aware of signs of human trafficking in prostitution cases, and victims can avoid unnecessary prosecution); and
- Affording law enforcement enhanced tools to build cases against traffickers.

TVPJA has already passed in the Senate and is one of the provisions of the Women's Equality Act, which was first proposed in 2013. NOW New York President Sonia Ossorio said, "The passage of TVPJA is a strong start. We look forward to working with our lawmakers and allies to advance other measures critical to women and girls, including protecting women's reproductive health, securing equal pay, ending discrimination in the workplace, providing paid family leave, and expanding affordable, quality child care."

*The National Organization for Women is the nation's largest organization working to advance women's rights and improve women's lives. NOW New York aims to protect and promote reproductive justice, secure workplace equality, combat racism and homophobia, and end discrimination and violence against all women.*

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