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Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

United States House of Representatives

Testimony of Dallas Jessup: Founder of Just Yell Fire, Inc.

About Dallas Jessup (18) – CNN Hero and Youth Activist, Dallas grew a community service project to fight predators into the non profit Just Yell Fire which is now a Million Girl Revolution across 48 countries. She leads the organization while a freshman at Vanderbilt University as a McKelvey Scholar for Social Entrepreneurship.

Testimony - Congressman McGovern, Congressman Wolf, and Members of the Commission, I'm here as founder and spokesperson of the non profit Just Yell Fire. Our mission is to empower girls aged 11 to 19 to fight back against predators and the modern day slave traders of the sex trafficking industry. These are the girls most-targeted by traffickers to abduct and force or intimidate into the horrific circumstances that define this 100 billion dollar worldwide menace.

We have a different approach to the trafficking crisis – It's a high-impact solution that is showing remarkable success. In fact, it's working for more than 1 million girls in 48 countries, so far.

In the Just Yell Fire solution, it is the Teenage Girl on the front lines of human trafficking who becomes the hero who will put an end to the sex trafficking industry in this generation. I'll admit it's a pretty scary thought: that we place our bet on the average 14-year-old, who could walk through a room filled with leopards and not notice because she is text messaging; she is naïve beyond belief.

However, we have learned that with a specific type of education; a combination of danger avoidance, rights awareness, and get-away skills, the Teenage Girl becomes the most effective weapon against the traffickers. Police can't be everywhere, nor can parents – so it's up to us girls to fight this war and here's how we're doing it.

Let me share what we've discovered first hand, what we're doing about it, and the surprising results. We have learned three things:

First, Most of us take for granted that girls somehow know they have a right to stand up for themselves; that they can say “No” to verbal, emotional, and physical abuse or threats; that they can report violence against them. But, after a lifetime of “Do what you're told” “Don't talk back” & “Always do what an adult tells you”, Girls do not know they have their own rights.

I know this because I speak at dozens of schools and every time there are a few girls who come up after and tell me they are abused or pressured into high risk

behavior. They tell me they didn't know they could stop it until they heard our Girls Bill of Rights. So, we must tell them their rights.

Second,

We have learned that Teenage girls are naïve and have no clue as to the dangers they face every single day. They don't believe they are in any danger and they don't know what to look out for. We must arm them with that knowledge. Give these girls a basic danger awareness and avoidance education. And,

Third,

Anyone with a daughter knows that no matter how much you warn us of danger, we're still going to do stupid things anyway. We can be pretty dumb but we shouldn't have to die for it. So the final piece to the puzzle is girls need and want get-away strategies for when they do get into the perilous situations created by traffickers.

That is the dangerous landscape where teenage girls live. Here's what we're doing about it:

Just Yell Fire started when I set out to make a home movie to teach my schoolmates some cool get-away moves I learned studying for my street-fighting instructorship. The word got out we were making a film to keep girls safe and 30

days later a professional crew of 30 and 100 extras had volunteered to help out. Even Josh Holloway and Evangeline Lilly of LOST lent a hand.

The police helped us with safety awareness, educators helped us with a Girls Bill of Rights, and my martial arts coaches helped come up with 10 fast-learn get away moves girls can learn in an hour, like biting or eye gouging. 60 days later we put the Just Yell Fire movie online as a free download and formed a non profit to ship DVDs to any girl without Internet access.

It became 1 of the 10 most-downloaded production-length films worldwide and between its launch in 2006 and today we have given away more than 1 million downloads and DVDs in 48 countries; still at the rate of more than 10,000 each month. For an example of the breadth of this thing: consider that more than 10% of our downloads are in Iran, Pakistan, and other places not-known for girls empowerment. That's the movie, and we're working on the next one.

The second way we spread the Just Yell Fire word is by speaking at schools, shelters, law enforcement conferences, and women's events.

As an example we went to India to present Just Yell Fire at 12 colleges in rural and urban areas where trafficking is at a crisis level; girls are taken because there is minimal law enforcement and they can be sold for \$1,000 to \$15,000 dollars. Girls are scared there – Twenty Thousand of them showed up to learn

stay-safe skills. The need and demand for information is pervasive: We speak at upscale prep schools and at some of the more challenging urban schools; I talk to groups of girls in the system, to concerned parents and teachers. We're going to Australia this summer and South Africa after that.

And last, because I can't be everywhere we are leveraging Just Yell Fire with Train the Trainer classes where we teach groups of coaches, teachers, and police how to present our information to keep their girls safe. These events are usually sponsored by local businesses or parents organizations in response to high profile abductions or killings.

The way we can track our results is by the anywhere from 5 to hundreds of emails and letters we receive each day. Parents write to thank us for protecting their girls, and tell us about some who got away because they had received the Just Yell Fire information. Victims write to thank us for spotlighting the crisis and offering solutions. An AIDS Orphans shelter in Africa wrote to tell us their kids are being raped in the streets but they're training them with our tools. We have 100s of stories like this from everywhere

I would ask today that we accept that the trafficking of teenage girls is not an impossible social problem – that it can and must be stopped;

While human trafficking takes many forms: abduction, forced labor, and long term sexual-slavery-for-profit: Every one of these can be reduced or eliminated with an education-based solution;

Just Yell Fire has reached 1 million girls, but the way you get to 100 million, the really big answer, is in the classroom.

The premise is simple: if you make self defense, personal rights awareness, and danger avoidance a mandatory part of health class and PE, every year, for every teen girl; within a few years you will have the most powerful generation of young women in history. Girls who aren't easily tricked, intimidated, or taken – a generation of heroes who turn the tables on traffickers and put these predators out of business.

Can there be so simple a solution to a worldwide crisis? MIT says “Yes”; they adopted Just Yell Fire as a for-credit course to spread the skills. The FBI says “Yes”, they use us to train their daughters. Shelters in Africa, women's groups in Pakistan, law enforcement organizations in many countries, the NYPD sex crimes unit, groups across America, and scores of others have formed Just Yell Fire communities to protect their girls. The next step is a simple solution – substitute self defense for dodge ball in America's schools; and you change the world.

Members of the commission, thank you for the work you are doing and for the privilege of testifying.

End Testimony
