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March 28, 2022

TO: The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: SCR 223/ SR216 – URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO ESTABLISH OR CONTRACT WITH A VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDER TO MAINTAIN AN EMERGENCY SHELTER FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF SEX TRAFFICKING.

HEARING: March 29, 2022, 3:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of this resolution, offers comments, and defers to the Office of Youth Services (OYS).

PURPOSE: This resolution urges the Department of Human Services to establish or contract with a victim service provider to operate and maintain an emergency shelter for children who are survivors of sex trafficking.

The Department agrees that more resources are needed to support minors who are victims of sex trafficking or sexual exploitation and will continue to work with OYS and community providers to address the needs of children and youth survivors of sex trafficking. If the Legislature wants to expand shelter capacity, future appropriations will be needed to contract services, provide oversight, and facilitate data collection and sharing.

Currently, DHS Child Welfare Services (CWS) protocol ensures that identified trafficked children and youth are assessed and receive appropriate services and protections, regardless of parental abuse or neglect. The Department contracts a provider that delivers statewide victim-

centered, trauma-informed comprehensive services that are individualized and responsive to the needs, values, culture, and gender identity of minor victims of human trafficking. The provider also conducts training for DHS, resource caregivers, and the community that promotes public awareness of the sexual exploitation of children.

For youth in DHS foster custody, CWS currently uses its emergency shelters and current list of resource caregivers to place minor victims of sex trafficking. In addition, CWS also uses the Hale Kipa Hale Lanipolua Assessment Center (HLAC) at the KYFWC, which serves minors, ages 12 through 17, who are victims and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Since its opening, CWS has placed 70 youth in foster care at HLAC.

DHS continues its ongoing work to ensure these minor victims are identified and receive appropriate services. Notably, to maintain the operations of this and future emergency shelters, funding will need to become a line item in the OYS base budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this resolution.