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Good morning and thank you for having me. It is an honor to be here today.* I would like to share my story to inform and equip people to understand and identify sex trafficking. My hope is that this will ignite a passion from within to act and help bring about change. There is something everyone can do to end modern day slavery.

Today I stand proxy on behalf of the many survivors across the globe - those who were not able to survive and those who have not yet discovered that they have a voice. As I share, I ask that you take a moment and think of your dearest family members - your daughter, your son, your niece or nephew. What happened to me could happen to anyone.

At the age of 25, as a newly divorced military spouse, I got into a social scene in Hawaii. I met a man in a nightclub who I thought I liked. We dated for two weeks and during that time, he got to know everything about me: where I lived, where my daughter went to preschool, where my family lived, where I worked. I had a college degree. I had a career. I was doing pretty well. But I didn't know who he was and what he was about – he was very charming and seemed genuine. Although an adult, I was young and quite naïve.

At the end of those two weeks, he drove me to what they call a “track” – a strip or street where women and girls “work” as prostitutes. He told me he had many girls and women working for him and said, “The truth is I am a pimp. I own an escort agency and you will now work for me.”

Of course, I quickly disagreed. I said that wasn't who I was nor what I wanted to do. He then got out of the vehicle and went over to the corner and violently beat every single female that was out there until they were covered in blood, screaming, and crying for him to stop. He told me that is what he would do to me. He said he would kill me, my daughter, and grandmother if I didn't do exactly what he said, or if I tried to tell the police.

I was deathly afraid of him then, and those two weeks turned into two years of my life. He listed me on several websites including Backpage, Craigslist, and Red Book. He also advertised me in newspapers as providing “sensual massages.” I was exploited. I was used by men who either didn't know or didn't care what was happening to me.

During this time the largest clientele was Service members. Hawaii is a state that is known as Paradise. It is a world-wide vacation destination. It is not a place where most people would automatically think such dehumanization exists.

But Hawaii is also a place where every branch of Service in the U.S. military is represented. We have large events such as the Pro Bowl, a football game known nationwide. We also have events such as RIMPAC, the Rim of the Pacific Exercise. It is the world's largest international maritime warfare exercise, held biennially in Hawaii during June and July of even-numbered years.

These events attract traffickers who bring in women and girls and also boys from all over the world. They do this because Service members were the main clientele looking to purchase sex. We would be driven to military bases and nearby bars, where the pimps would watch us look for

the drunk military soldiers to proposition them. The transactions would happen everywhere - in barracks, in homes and apartments, on military bases, in warehouses, in military personnel vehicles, in personal cars, and even while Service members were on and off duty. On duty Service members would often see what was going on and turn a blind eye to it.

This nightmare continued for me for two years. Every single day I fought. To keep us under his control, the trafficker did terrible things to me and other girls. For example, he did something he called “timbing” where he would put on his Timberland boots and stomp on us forcefully, violently; that stayed with us. In this way he created invisible chains that kept me in bondage, and kept me fearful that if I told someone or tried to escape, he would kill me. I came to believe that there was no way I could get away from this man. Even though I fought with everything inside of me to get away. I did not want this life. I did not want to be used and exploited. I wanted to be a mother to my daughter. I wanted to be a woman who thrived in her career and lived as a human being should. But I was trapped in this terrible existence out of fear, intimidation, and threats to my life and the lives of those I loved.

It wasn't until the Miami Super Bowl of 2010 that I was able to escape. The trafficker decided to take us to the Super Bowl there because he thought he could make a lot of money in a short amount of time. We didn't realize at the same time law enforcement was preparing an operation to sweep the streets of South Beach in Miami, Florida expectant that the Super Bowl would attract human trafficking activity. The pimp was caught and detained. We were questioned and for the first time in two years, people seemed to not only recognize that something terrible was happening, but they did something about it to help us.

After questioning, I returned to Hawaii along with another adult female and a 15-year-old girl that he had trafficked. The case made headlines and the pimp was convicted and sentenced to 22 years in federal prison.

During the time of the trial, I didn't know what to do with myself, but I began a process of realizing that I had been a victim of a terrible crime. Slowly, I healed, and I vowed that I would dedicate my life to helping victims of trafficking to obtain help and services - everything I wish I had, every service that I wish was available to me, I wanted to create for them.

And that is what I have done. Within my 10 years of professional experience, I have worked as a crisis responder under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), and am currently with the State of Hawaii Department of the Attorney General Missing Child Center- Hawaii. Additionally, as a fellow of the Human Trafficking Leadership Academy (HTLA), I have been able to contribute toward strengthening policy and a system wide response to help victims persevere to survivor hood.

This HTLA fellowship was developed and delivered by the following agencies: Coro, Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP), the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), and the Office on Women's Health (OWH) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC).

One last story I would like to share. I had the honor of mentoring a 15-year-old female military dependent. Her mother was a Service member and they lived on an unsecured base. Every day, this young girl would walk to school. Pimps have used this unsecured base as a place to target young girls. As she was walking one day, a pimp approached her. Told her she was beautiful, told her that she could do great things. He started spending time with her, grooming her to have a liking to him. He started spending time with her and soon after, she ran away from home with him. Her mother was a service member, single and engaged to be remarried. Her daughter was only gone overnight and returned the next day. She then ran away again and was gone for two weeks. When her mother questioned her, she said, "Well I have a boyfriend now and he loves me and we are going to do great things together."

It turned out that her new "boyfriend" was a pimp and had put her on international escort agency websites advertising her for \$200, \$400, and \$600. During the two weeks that she was away she was gang raped, purchased by many men, and the pimp took all of this money. She was posted on several websites; a lot of nude photos and also videos of her were posted online. With all diligence, law enforcement was able to locate, recover, and reunite this child with her mother. During the time she was gone, she was severely abused, assaulted, and malnourished, leaving her bruised, injured, and weighing 20lbs. less than her normal weight.

I share my story, and the story of this young girl, to provide insight on this horrible epidemic occurring within the United States. It is not like what you see in the movies. It is about ordinary people. They are not all from bad backgrounds, or a certain state or country. It can happen to any person, any gender, any age, any race, and any economic background. It involves Service members. It impacts families. Bringing hope by being the change I want to see in this world is what I do. There is something everyone can do to end modern day slavery. What will you do?

* Transcribed from presentation at the Department of Defense National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month Awareness event on January 09, 2019.