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**Testimony of the Office of the Attorney General
Written Only Proponent for SB 71
House Committee on the Judiciary
March 3, 2025**

Chairwoman Humphries and Members of the Committee:

The Office of the Attorney General supports this proposal, which will elevate the charge for first-time buyers of sex to a felony and require offenders to complete an educational or treatment program focused on commercial sexual exploitation. This legislation represents a significant step forward in the fight against human trafficking and sexual exploitation, aiming to address the root cause of these heinous crimes: demand. By implementing these measures, we can disrupt the cycle of exploitation and provide a path to rehabilitation for offenders while reducing the harm inflicted on vulnerable individuals.

The requirement for the Office of the Attorney General to promulgate rules and regulations for educational and treatment programs by July 1, 2026, ensures that these programs will be developed thoughtfully and effectively. Drawing inspiration from the successful framework of the batterers' intervention program, we will review candidates for program offerings that emphasize the human impact of sexual exploitation. These programs will aim to educate offenders on the prevalence of human trafficking and the trauma experienced by victims, fostering a deeper understanding of the societal and individual consequences of their actions.

To ensure the program's sustainability without imposing a burden on taxpayers, offenders will bear the financial responsibility for participating in these educational or treatment programs. This approach not only makes the program self-sufficient but also reinforces accountability, as offenders will directly contribute to the cost of their rehabilitation. We anticipate hiring a single program coordinator to oversee and monitor the program, which will require limited initial funding to launch and operate effectively.

Increasing penalties for buying sexual relations is a proven demand-reduction strategy that can significantly curb exploitation. By targeting the demand side of the equation, we can dismantle the economic incentives that drive human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This legislation

underscores the critical role buyers play in perpetuating these systems of abuse, sending a clear message that their actions have severe legal and societal consequences.

A buyer's education program is a key intervention strategy to prevent recidivism among offenders. Research shows that many buyers are unaware of the exploitative realities faced by those from whom they purchase sex. Through targeted educational efforts, we can challenge their misconceptions and promote empathy and accountability. Studies, such as the evaluation of San Francisco's First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP), have demonstrated the effectiveness of "John schools" in reducing recidivism by at least 40%, providing a compelling case for the implementation of similar programs nationwide.

This legislation also presents an invaluable opportunity to fight human trafficking and sexual exploitation on a systemic level. By reducing the demand for commercial sex, we can create a ripple effect that disrupts trafficking networks and decreases the prevalence of exploitation. Buyers play a pivotal role in perpetuating these systems, and holding them accountable is a necessary step in breaking the cycle of abuse.

Additionally, the educational component of this program will highlight the connection between the selling of sexual relations and human trafficking. Many individuals engaged in sex work are coerced or forced into these circumstances, often through violence, manipulation, or economic desperation. By educating buyers on these realities, we can foster a greater awareness of the harm they cause and encourage behavior change.

The success of demand-reduction strategies hinges on addressing the critical missing link in most anti-trafficking efforts: the buyers. They are responsible for inflicting immense trauma on vulnerable individuals and sustaining a criminal industry that thrives on exploitation. This legislation acknowledges their role and introduces meaningful consequences to deter future offenses.

In conclusion, the Office of the Attorney General encourages your committee to move this legislation forward. It is a necessary step toward reducing the demand for commercial sex, disrupting human trafficking networks, and fostering accountability and rehabilitation among offenders. We urge swift passage of this bill to advance the fight against exploitation and protect the dignity and safety of individuals in our communities.

Respectfully Submitted,

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