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When Law and Justice Succeed: Trafficked Victims Offered Diversion in Ohio

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Much has happened in Ohio to put an end to human trafficking since my previous post, "[When Law and Justice Collide](#)." At that point HB 262, (the Safe Harbor Act) had recently passed. As of June 2014, Ohio passed HB 130, (the End Demand Act), which focuses on the "johns" and ending demand for prostitution, therefore ending the demand for sex trafficking. Another area that has made impressive progress is the CATCH ([Changing Actions to Change Habits](#)) Court.

CATCH was initiated in Ohio by Franklin County Municipal Court Judge Paul Herbert. Judge Herbert realized that many of the defendants accused of prostitution before him exhibited signs of domestic violence and appeared to be coerced into prostitution—making them [victims](#) and not criminals. He investigated the grim statistics on human trafficking and felt the need to offer the women support instead of condemnation. I can only describe the process from this point as transformative.



I walked into his court, fully expecting the familiar proceedings I have witnessed in the past. The first thing I noticed was that there were no men, except the judge. These women had such bad experiences with men that to allow them in the courtroom would be too traumatic. I made my way through a crowd of women seated along the outside of the court. I found

out later that these were the advocates representing the many nonprofit agencies and services that supported these women.

Within the court was another ring of women who were in the program already. They were there to offer support and advice to the woman before the judge that day. The judge was announced—but instead of going straight to the bench—he walked over to a chalkboard and addressed the women in the program. He talked about concepts such as habits and how they influence actions. He had an amazingly casual and supportive air.

He then moved behind the bench and the proceedings took a more familiar turn. The victim was brought before the court. Judge Herbert read the charges and addressed the legal formalities. He then offered her the option of a diversion. If she stayed clean for two years, left the influences she was currently under, and attended mandatory counseling services, she could have her record expunged. Once she agreed, the procedure went from adjudication to support group.

The judge asked the victim to turn around and address the women and read a statement she had prepared. The day I was there, the victim read a poem and there was hardly a dry eye in the place. The women in the program were then asked to comment and one-by-one they stood and offered positive advice and counsel. The newest “sister” was then accepted into a program that would neither judge nor condemn her but give her as much support as she would accept.

For a similar success in New York, see the recent [blog](#) post by AMU Professor Michelle Beshears. AMU, in collaboration with the International Police Training Institute, will host the second annual [International Summit on Combating Human Trafficking Nov. 17 -20, 2014](#).

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