



HUMAN RIGHTS
for KIDS

California Legislature Approves Historic Bill to End Practice of Trying Child Trafficking & Sexual Abuse Victims As Adults When They Commit Offenses Against Their Abusers

SB 545 will ensure child victims have access to treatment and services instead of incarceration

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Contact: Emily Virgin, Director of Advocacy & Government Relations
(405) 306-4294
evirgin@humanrightsforkids.org

Today, the California State Senate gave its final approval to SB 545, the Safeguarding Against Felonies and Exploitation of (SAFE) Children Act. The legislation, authored by State Sen. Susan Rubio (D-West Covina), prohibits child sex trafficking and abuse victims from being tried as adults when they commit acts of violence against their abusers. Additionally, the bill requires that juvenile courts consider a child's trauma history, background, involvement in the foster care system, and other important factors, when deciding whether a child should be transferred to adult criminal court.

California becomes the first state in the nation to pass legislation to end the practice of transferring children into the adult criminal justice system for violent offenses, including homicide, when the offense is committed against the child's trafficker or abuser. Instead of decades of imprisonment, child victims will be given the opportunity to heal from their traumas with treatment and services in the juvenile or family court system.

Human Rights for Kids sponsored this important legislation and worked with legislative champion Sen. Rubio and her staff, California public defenders, and other key allies throughout the legislative process. Survivor advocates Jarrett Harper, founder of Better Days, and Sara Kruzan, HRFK Fellow, testified about their lived experience in both the Senate and Assembly Committee hearings.

Jarrett Harper said “the passage of Senate Bill 545, the SAFE Children Act, is a crucial step towards protecting and empowering California's most vulnerable population. The strong, bipartisan support for this legislation tells the nation that California stands strong in its commitment to protect the rights and welfare of every child in our state. I'm proud that California is taking a proactive stance in preventing child abuse and neglect, ensuring the safety and well-being of our future generation.”

HRFK Fellow Sara Kruzan stated about the passage of SB 545, “this bill is policy reimaged with healing at the forefront, especially for children who have been exposed to various forms of moral injuries such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and child sex trafficking. The passage of the SAFE Children Act sends a clear message of bipartisanship that supports restorative and transformative best practices, allowing for safe opportunities for healing. Thank you all who have championed and supported this important legislation.”

Emily Virgin, Director of Advocacy & Government Relations, noted "this legislation makes California the leader in protecting vulnerable children who enter the justice system by ensuring they have the age-appropriate and trauma-informed care and services that they need. Too often, states use a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, but with the passage of this legislation, children in California will be seen for who they are and the experiences that have led them to their interaction with the justice system. We are incredibly grateful for the leadership of Senator Rubio and the steadfast support of her office."

The bill will now go to Gov. Newsom for his approval.