



COOK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Thomas J. Dart, Sheriff

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New Legislation Gets Tough on Predators of State Wards

COOK COUNTY, IL – Cook County Sheriff Thomas J. Dart praised state legislators for passing a bill that empowers judges to come down harder on criminals who exploit wards of the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS).

The legislation sought by Sheriff Dart, SB201, allows judges to consider a trafficking victim's DCFS status when sentencing a criminal who exploited that victim – leading to longer prison terms for those offenders.

"For too long, DCFS wards have been viewed as easy targets for predators who trap them in prostitution," Sheriff Dart said. "This bill is part of a comprehensive effort to protect these vulnerable youth – along with stepped up enforcement by my office."

State Rep. LaShawn K. Ford, D-Chicago, sponsored the bill in the House of Representatives where it passed unanimously Wednesday.

"When the state has to intervene, and place a young person in the protective care of DCFS, it is the state's responsibility to protect them," Rep. Ford said. "I applaud Sheriff Tom Dart for stepping in to bring this bill to help deter known abuse of at-risk youth."

State Sen. Bill Cunningham, D-Chicago, sponsored the bill in the State Senate, where it passed earlier this month. The bill now proceeds to the Governor's office.

"A recent Chicago Tribune series detailed the fact that human traffickers often specifically target and recruit wards of the state who reside in group homes because they see them as vulnerable and susceptible to being lured into a life of prostitution," Cunningham said. "SB201 would enable judges to enhance the sentences they impose on pimps and traffickers in those cases."

Sheriff Dart has been focusing his office's strategy on traffickers who seek to exploit these children. These efforts helped shut down one of the facilities featured in the Tribune articles that often let youth walk into the arms of pimps.