Hello, my name is Rebekah and on behalf of AMP I am here to request that Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter Training include information on Human Trafficking, so mandatory reporters know what it is and how to recognize it. Recognizing key indicators of human trafficking is the first step in identifying victims and can help save lives. For those of you who are unaware, youth are being trafficked in plain sight on a daily basis. Most young people have access to the internet through their cell phones or a school computer. These items are vital components in completing homework and communicating with friends and family. These devices are also key when traffickers recruit or contact youth. Believe me, I know how important cell phones are to teenagers today, but if they display fear or panic when the phone is taken away, that’s a possible sign they are under someone’s control. Pimps may be significant others, older friends or even family. Recruiting can happen in school, at the mall, through Facebook…virtually everywhere a teen goes. Traffickers establish a positive relationship with young people, showing how much they care which causes the youth to trust and rely on them. During this time information is gathered which can be used to control the youth later on when the violence occurs. Loved ones are threatened to force compliance.

Think about this: most high schools have open campus. A parent can give their teen permission to leave school during the day to come home for lunch or dismiss early. This allows teens to leave school grounds on their own or be picked up by a pimp and returned to school before their next class without alerting school personnel or parents.

In my family, I have siblings who have been trafficked; their stories are horrifying! I can’t imagine being forced to do sexual acts and used as currency for drugs or a way to pay parent’s rent. It makes me realize how blessed I am that they were taken out of those situations and placed in my home as my siblings. They were helped by people who recognized what was going on and reported it, yet for some kids this doesn’t happen. Current law states that mandatory reporters “may” call this possible abuse in to DHS. AMP requests for children age 12 and older that reporting to DHS be required; especially in cases where the abuse was perpetrated by a person who was not a caretaker or a person responsible for the care of the child.

If you think sex trafficking isn’t a problem in Iowa…think again! We need to equip mandatory reporters with the knowledge to recognize the signs of Human Trafficking in order to establish community partnerships to prevent, identify and stop trafficking activity. Help us keep Iowa’s youth safe!