



# THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A CHILD PROSTITUTE



## California Agrees: There's No Such Thing as a Child Prostitute

By Yasmin Vafa, Executive Director, Rights4Girls

One year ago, we launched a campaign in California, called "[No Such Thing as a Child Prostitute](#)." Our goal? To eliminate the very notion of "child prostitute" in both language and in law. We began our advocacy in LA by partnering with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and County Board of Supervisors who showed great courage by dramatically shifting their policies when encountering young women and girls who were being sex-trafficked. In the County of Los Angeles, trafficked girls are no longer placed in handcuffs and criminalized for their exploitation. Instead, survivors are treated as victims of crime and given the services and support that are offered to other victims of child sexual abuse and violence. Now, one year later, this policy has been enacted state-wide in California, thanks to the leadership of Governor Jerry Brown, State Senator Holly Mitchell, and the champions of SB 1322, otherwise known as the "No Such Thing" bill.

When we launched our No Such Thing campaign, we had no idea how long it would take for change to take hold. But fortunately, our victories came quickly beginning with the significant changes made in LA County. Our second victory came in April 2016 when the Associated Press [updated](#) their authoritative Style Guide to discourage the use of "child prostitute" and related terms when referring to victims of child sex trafficking, largely in response to our [petition](#).

Today's enactment of SB 1322 is our biggest No Such Thing campaign victory to date. Over the past year we have worked with survivors and advocates in California to leverage the power of our campaign to influence lawmakers that it was time to make a change—it was time to stop arresting and charging children with prostitution.



But the achievements did not stop there— today, Governor Brown signed three other significant pieces of legislation that we were proud to have contributed to— all echoing the essential principles of No Such Thing to protect survivors while holding exploiters accountable. These bills included AB 1276, which affords child victim witnesses the ability to testify through closed circuit television so they do not have to face their exploiters in open court, AB 1761 which provides an affirmative defense to survivors with convictions directly related to their exploitation, and AB 2948, which protects the privacy of victims of human trafficking and expedites prosecutions for buyers.

The passage of these critical laws marks a clear shift in the public perception of sexually exploited youth as victims rather than criminals. We are thrilled that media and lawmakers alike are finally beginning to understand that there is no such thing as a child prostitute. And as we have seen with many other important issues, California often leads the way for the rest of the nation in creating significant cultural change. Our hope is that other states will now follow suit to provide necessary protections to our most vulnerable girls.