



NOTE: RECIPIENT NAMES FOLLOW THE TEXT OF THE LETTER

June 22, 2016

Dear Editors and Producers,

The Associated Press recently changed its Stylebook to discourage the use of the term “child prostitute” and similar variations on the phrase. This change came after more than a year of intense advocacy from those of us who have been fighting to change the way that America treats underage girls who are trafficked for sex. Our goal is to stop arrests of trafficked children and instead get them the support they need.

Simply put, there is no such thing as a child prostitute. There is no difference between paying to rape a child and raping a child; all victims of child sex abuse should be treated the same way.

The Columbia Journalism Review reported on this change on April 6: “*AP* now recommends that writers avoid using the word ‘prostitute’ when a child is involved, as in ‘child prostitute,’ ‘teenage prostitute,’ and so forth, because it implies that the child ‘is voluntarily trading sex for money,’ [AP Standards Editor Tom] Kent says, and a child, by definition, cannot do so.”

This was a landmark decision that was not only a victory for accuracy in reporting but also for child trafficking victims and survivors. In fact, AP’s action came just months after the County of Los Angeles -- the largest in the country -- began the process of no longer arresting trafficked children, but instead getting them appropriate medical, mental health and social services.

We are fighting hard with allies in Congress to make change for and raise awareness about trafficked children in the United States. We want more jurisdictions to stop arresting child victims until there are none left in the country that do. That means we need the public to have an accurate understanding of the problem.

All of your news organizations have used the phrase “child prostitute” or a similar phrase in the past year. We urge you to change this practice going forward. We also recognize that there is still an enormous amount of advocacy and education to be done, including in newsrooms

We stand ready to work with you and help you and your colleagues better understand this problem and explain the reasons why change is urgently needed. Indeed, the way you report on trafficked girls affects the way society perceives this problem.



We hope you will see the AP's action as a path forward for your own organization. Please let us know if we can help in any way.

Sincerely,

Yasmin Vafa
Executive Director
Rights4Girls

Recipients of this letter include the following editors and producers:

Dean Baquet, Executive Editor, The New York Times
Alberto Avendano, Executive Editor, The Washington Post
Kelly Flynn, Senior Executive Producer, CNN
Polly Powell, Bureau Chief, NBC (Los Angeles)
David Colton, Executive Editor, USA Today
Liz Heron, Executive Editor, The Huffington Post
Mike Burback, Editor, Twin Cities Pioneer Press
Aviado Khahaifa, Publisher/Editor-in-Chief, The Orlando Sentinel