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To the Editor:

Over the last four years, Women's Giving Alliance has been funding programs and agencies that provide mental health services for women and girls in Northeast Florida. Through this work, we have learned that the vast majority of women and girls who require public mental health services have been the victims of violence or other trauma, and require care that is focused on and sensitive to that trauma.

It is difficult to imagine a more traumatized population than the child victims of sex trafficking. These children (who are overwhelmingly girls) have been bought, sold, drugged and repeatedly violated. With the 2012 passage of The Safe Harbor Act, the Florida Legislature ensured that our children who are rescued from trafficking are treated as victims, not as criminals. What remains lacking in Florida is funding for an effective network of post-trauma services for these children. A pilot program called **Open Doors: First Responder Network for Child Victims of Sex Trafficking** that will create such a network has been proposed to the Legislature, and Northeast Florida is one of four target regions for implementation. Jacksonville was chosen because it has a high incidence both of trafficking and of rescuing victims, but lacks the necessary services.

The Women's Giving Alliance supports the funding of the Open Doors program. It has many of the elements we look for in funding agencies which provide mental health services: the pilot is research-based, scalable, employs best practices including experienced case managers and peer mentors, and represents collaboration among several organizations that advocate for and work with these children.

We urge the Florida Legislature to finish the good work it started with the Safe Harbor Act, and fund the network of services that these girls so desperately need.

Paula Liang
President, Women's Giving Alliance

The Women's Giving Alliance, an initiative of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, has 335 members who pool their charitable contributions to make grants benefitting women and girls in Northeast Florida. www.womensgivingalliance.org