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**MEDIA RELEASE**

Prosecuting Attorney Keith M. Kaneshiro told a state House committee that a provision in a bill that would decriminalize prostitution by minors could have dangerous outcomes.

Proponents of H.B. 1902, H.D. 1 say minors engaged in prostitution are victims who should not be criminalized. The bill reduces the offense of prostitution from a misdemeanor to a petty misdemeanor for adults and a violation for minors.

Kaneshiro told the House Committee on Finance that lowering penalties for minors engaged in prostitution was a bad idea.

“This bill legalizes prostitution,” Kaneshiro said. “(The bill’s) definition of prostitution does not include conduct by any person under the age of 18.”

Kaneshiro said the wording of the bill also was contradictory as there can be no violation if prostitution by minors is not prohibited by law.

But the most troubling aspect of the bill, Kaneshiro said, was the possibility that it could result in exactly the opposite outcome that proponents seek.

“By making (prostitution) a violation, minors would be targeted by pimps,” Kaneshiro told legislators. “Pimps would recruit minors by telling them they could make money and if they are caught, it would only be a violation.

“In the haste to protect minors, this provision exposes minors to more danger.”

Kaneshiro told the committee that minors are already protected because their juvenile records are confidential and that minors arrested for prostitution are sent to Family Court for treatment and counseling and not punishment.

The bill also replaces the term “promoting prostitution” with “sex trafficking,” a move Kaneshiro considers unnecessary as the existing statute covers trafficking and has been used to target those who profit from prostitution – and with great success.

Since 2011, 19 cases against 22 pimps have been initiated by the prosecutor’s office. Of the nine cases that have thus far gone to trial, eight have resulted in convictions, with sentences ranging from one year to 20 years.