



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25305

PATRICK MORRISEY
ATTORNEY GENERAL

(304) 558-2021
FAX (304) 558-0140

Best Practices for Combating Human Trafficking in West Virginia

Background

Human trafficking is defined as:

Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or commercial sex when the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age. The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subsection (a) is involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.

Human trafficking is considered the fastest growing and second largest criminal industry in the world today – second only to drug trafficking according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Most of the human trafficking victims within the United States were born in this country. The average entry age of American minors into the sex trade is 12-14 years old with many human trafficking victims being runaway girls or foster children who have already suffered sexual abuse as children.

The prevalence and anonymity of the internet has fueled the rapid growth of sex trafficking, making the trade of women and children easier than ever before.

West Virginia provides an environment in which human trafficking can thrive given the need of opioid addicts to supply their habit without means of financial support, together with previously insufficient laws regarding human trafficking, as well as social and legal paradigms that view those engaged in commercial sex, even when forced, as mere criminals and not the victims that they often are.

Objectives

1. Raise awareness within the law enforcement community through training, cooperation and communication in order to update those law enforcement officers protecting our state and its citizens with recent changes in West Virginia law and to assist in formulating standardized procedures to effectively respond to this emerging crime.
2. Work with other stakeholders such as social support agencies and other non-governmental organizations to:
 - Gather more data that will track state arrests and prosecutions
 - Raise awareness to reduce the demand
 - Promote strong state statutes and forceful state prosecutions
 - Mobilize communities to increase care for victims
3. Assist in opening lines of communication between the various stakeholders to better provide a victim-centered approach.

Recommendations

1. The West Virginia Office of the Attorney General through cooperation with the Law Enforcement Professional Standards Board should develop an accredited curriculum for law enforcement officer training so that officers in the field can better recognize, respond to, and investigate crimes involving Human Trafficking.
2. Prioritize anti-human trafficking training for law enforcement officers and investigators and encourage their attendance to such training when provided.
3. Promote the use of field screening questionnaires when law enforcement officers have interaction with anyone who is suspected or likely to be a victim of human trafficking.
4. Train officers to recognize those who are forced, coerced or defrauded into prostitution for the benefit of another, and all under-aged children engaging in prostitution, are by statute human trafficking victims.
5. Recognize human trafficking victims often require a multitude of services that one agency alone cannot provide that include:
 - Interpretation services
 - Housing
 - Medical care
 - Mental health counseling
 - Substance abuse counseling
 - Safety planning
 - Education/schooling

- Help in contacting and ensuring safety of loved ones
 - Repatriation and reunification
 - Immigration assistance
6. Identify and partner with social service providers and relief agencies which can provide such services prior to the time of need.
 7. Engage in outreach to educate the public at large about the signs and dangers of human trafficking and how to report suspected cases.
 8. Maintain up to date statistics and make accurate reports on confirmed or suspected cases involving human trafficking so that the data may be used to identify emerging trends to guide enforcement efforts.
 9. Partner with other local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies for the free exchange of information with other investigators as human trafficking often crosses jurisdictional and even international boundaries.
 10. Appoint a specific member of the department to act as liaison with the West Virginia Civil Rights and Anti Human Trafficking Task Force to stay current on any developments which would aid in detection, investigation, prosecution and eradication of human trafficking throughout West Virginia.