

PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

SENATE MAJORITY POLICY COMMITTEE

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

JANUARY 11, 2024



Good afternoon, Chairman Laughlin and members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee. The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) appreciates the opportunity to offer remarks on human trafficking. The rise in human trafficking nationwide, as well as within the Commonwealth, is one of the most pressing issues plaguing society and stands at the forefront of our investigative efforts.

Human trafficking is widely misunderstood. Mainstream media has perpetuated an idea that human trafficking entails the kidnapping of a victim by a stranger who is then transported to another place. According to recent statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, less than 1% of human trafficking stems from stranger abductions. Human traffickers use force, fraud, and coercion to manipulate and maintain control over victims, while subjecting them to forced labor or sexual servitude. It is estimated there are more than 50 million victims of this form of servitude worldwide.

On a global scale, human trafficking is estimated to be a 150 billion dollar a year industry. Each year, in the United States alone, approximately 9.8 billion dollars is profited by human traffickers, with 60% of these funds solely derived from sex trafficking. Pennsylvania is ranked 9th in the United States for the highest number of reported human trafficking cases. Over the last five years alone, more than 876 criminal charges related to human trafficking have been filed in Pennsylvania. This accentuates the PSP's recognition and commitment to investigating and reducing this growing issue.

Post-pandemic internet and social media use has elevated the recruitment rates for human trafficking to an all-time high. In 2020 alone, law enforcement witnessed a 125% increase in online recruitment via Facebook and Instagram. These platforms allow human traffickers to target their victims from anywhere and sell their victims on a global

marketplace. Human traffickers can virtually entice their victims from Pennsylvania to travel and then work for them anywhere in the world. They can also sell their global victims to buyers in Pennsylvania. The world has become a global marketplace, with virtual shops essentially open in our Commonwealth.

Pennsylvania's geographic location offers an advantage to the transient movements inherent to human trafficking. While Pennsylvania's vast interstate highway system traverses and connects multiple states enhancing the ease of commerce and travel, it also allows human traffickers to travel to different locations quickly and potentially undetected by law enforcement. Also, because of Pennsylvania's spacious and massive farmlands, the Commonwealth is profitable for human traffickers who exploit victims through forced labor in the agriculture industry.

Unfortunately, human traffickers are skilled at the many forms of manipulation used to maintain control of victims. They exploit the most vulnerable people in our society, such as those with lower incomes, migrants, those battling addiction, the homeless, runaways, and children. Though human traffickers target these marginalized groups, anyone may become a victim of human trafficking. Because human traffickers see victims solely as a means for financial gain, they will target anyone by falsely gaining their trust or by tricking or manipulating their potential victims allowing the human trafficker to force these victims to engage in forced labor or sexual exploitation.

Training the law enforcement community to recognize human trafficking and educating the public are imperative to help identify victims and prosecute human traffickers. Through training, a law enforcement officer who encounters a potential human trafficker or victim is equipped with the knowledge to identify a possible human trafficking

situation and notify the appropriate investigators. Training and education in recognizing human trafficking has led to an increase in tips and reports generated from routine traffic stops and incidents. These “routine incident” investigations alone have resulted in numerous victims being saved from their traffickers. To educate the public about human trafficking, the PSP created a flier which details how to identify indicators of human trafficking and how to report it to the PSP via a toll-free hotline number, email, and a cellular phone-based application. **(See attached flier).**

Upon receiving tips on human trafficking, Troopers within the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Special Investigations Division, Organized Crime Task Force Units are primarily responsible for investigating human trafficking across the Commonwealth. Due to the nature and complexity of these cases, these Troopers are specially trained in nontraditional investigations which require victim-centered and trauma-informed investigatory approaches. All forms of human trafficking present investigatory challenges due to the trauma suffered by the victims and fear of retaliation.

In addition to investigating tips on possible human trafficking, the PSP also conducts non-traditional, proactive investigations. Investigations of this type allow Troopers and law enforcement partners to enter the world of sex trafficking and forced labor industries to help victims immediately. Each year, the PSP conducts between 15 and 20 human trafficking details across the Commonwealth. These details have led to the identification of approximately 150 human trafficking victims per year. These victims are immediately provided with services to start a path to recovery and exit servitude. Human trafficking details have also led to the identification of individuals attempting to purchase sex and the arrest of approximately 180 commercial sex buyers each year. By

reducing demand for sexual services through arrests, fewer victims may be subjected to sexual servitude. The PSP has also dismantled large-scale, multi-state sex trafficking operations, leading to successful state and federal prosecutions.

The PSP works closely with the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General as well as county District Attorney Offices and local law enforcement agencies to investigate and successfully prosecute crimes associated with human trafficking. The PSP also partners with federal entities such as Homeland Security Investigations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the United States Office of Attorney General. By using a task force approach, the PSP has developed relationships with both governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations to assist victims of human trafficking with resources and recovery.

As a brief example of a multi-agency cooperative investigation, during a human trafficking detail, investigators encountered a victim and immediately provided services through non-governmental organizations, including rehabilitation, long-term sober housing, obtaining identification documents, assistance with job applications, and recovery apartment searches. For the past five years, this victim-turned-survivor maintained employment and sobriety, garnered a relationship with their child, purchased a vehicle, and ultimately testified against their human trafficker. Such survivors have positive views of law enforcement and are willing to help other victims. Cooperative victims also equate to strong witnesses. The most successful cases prosecuted in Pennsylvania required the testimony of multiple victims/witnesses which resulted in the conviction of two sex traffickers and de facto life sentences totaling a maximum of 141 years of incarceration.

Although this testimony has generally focused on the PSP's efforts in combating the sex trafficking industry, it is important to mention investigative efforts targeting labor trafficking. Globally, labor trafficking is more prevalent than sex trafficking, but is underreported, making it extremely difficult to identify and prosecute traffickers.

In Pennsylvania, the number of labor trafficking investigations increases each year. In most cases, victims can be identified and through traditional and nontraditional means, investigations identify illegal business practices, large-scale criminal organizations, and the laundering of money often tied to organizations outside the United States. Although labor trafficking is reported less often than sex trafficking, victims are provided similar recovery opportunities. Labor trafficking cases are investigated under the same victim-centered, trauma-informed approach.

The PSP is committed to working with law enforcement and civilian partner agencies to remain at the forefront of investigating and prosecuting human trafficking offenders. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with information on this important topic.