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OPINION

Rep. Nancy Mace: Human trafficking is rising in South Carolina. Here's how we fight it. | Opinion

By **Rep. Nancy Mace**

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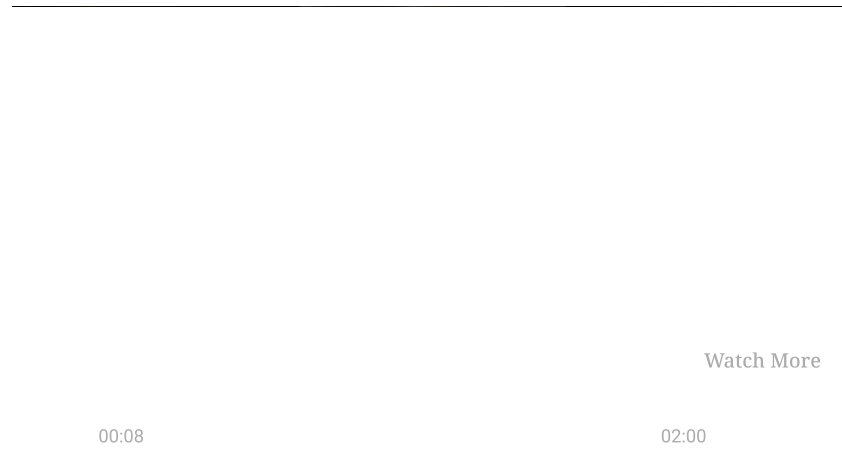
U.S. Representative Nancy Mace (R-SC) is shown at the U.S. Capitol in June 2024. Michael Brochstein *Michael Brochstein/Sipa USA* **Listen to this article**

In South Carolina, the scourge of human trafficking is not just a news segment or a distant tragedy; it is a pervasive threat to our children, our neighbors and our collective conscience. Last year alone, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division

[reported](#) an alarming 357 human trafficking cases involving nearly 500 potential victims, predominantly minors entrapped in sex trafficking.

This is a stark [increase](#) from 416 victims in 2022, signaling a critical and urgent need for action.

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The high incidence rates in the Lowcountry, where 93 cases were opened last year, not only shatter the peace of our neighborhoods but also call for an immediate and tailored response to protect our most vulnerable.

The state has made commendable strides with initiatives such as TraffickProofSC, a series of free, educational videos and materials aimed at educating our youth and community members about the dangers of human trafficking. Yet, while prevention is crucial, the need for robust victim support cannot be overstated. Attorney General Alan Wilson has [rightfully advocated](#) for increased funding to develop more shelters specifically for child victims — a testament to the state’s commitment to not only combating this crime but also healing its survivors.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist, driven by insufficient community awareness and the need for stronger legal frameworks to prosecute perpetrators effectively. It’s hard to imagine this kind of sick activity is happening right here at home.

Human traffickers exploit the vulnerable, but they also thrive in silence and ignorance.

To break this cycle, it is essential that we are vigilant. Reporting suspicious activities and understanding the signs of human trafficking can save lives and help law enforcement bring traffickers to justice.

I have been at the forefront of national efforts in Congress to combat human and sex trafficking. I was an original cosponsor of the [Human Trafficking Prevention Act](#), aiming to strengthen the tools available to law enforcement and enhance the support systems for survivors.

This bipartisan legislation, signed into law in 2022, not only bolsters law enforcement's capabilities but also requires the posting of national human trafficking hotline information in visible places across various public locations, including federal buildings, restrooms of U.S. aircraft, airports, bus stations, trains and ports of entry.

This ensures that help is just a phone call away for those who need it.

It is imperative we continue to support these initiatives at both the state and federal levels. Funding for victim services and preventive education cannot be episodic but must be sustained and increased. We need every school, every law enforcement agency and every community organization involved in these efforts.

Let us be clear: The fight against human trafficking is not just about law enforcement; it is about community engagement. It is about recognizing that behind every statistic is a person — a life altered by profound trauma.

We must come together to protect, to prevent and to prosecute, ensuring our region is safe for all its residents.

Moreover, growing up in Goose Creek and living in the Lowcountry my entire life, I've seen firsthand the impact that human trafficking has on our communities. The stories of young women and men being lured and forced to face unimaginable horrors are heart-wrenching.

By creating a robust support system for victims that addresses their immediate and long-term needs, we can offer them a path to recovery and reintegration.

Additionally, we must advocate for policies that target the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty and lack of education, which traffickers often exploit.

Only by addressing these underlying issues can we hope to eliminate human trafficking from the globe, starting with the United States.

Mace represents South Carolina's 1st Congressional District, which includes Charleston and Beaufort.

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