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Hearing: Combating Human Trafficking in Our Major Cities
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First, thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

I have had the distinct honor for more than a decade to work with a certain slice of our population. I am referring to those men, women and children who have fallen prey to international and domestic human trafficking, prostitution and sexual slavery. This truly has been a difficult endeavor, however, thankfully, through evidence based rehabilitation this difficult task has resulted in tremendous success for those who have been helped.

Allow me to describe briefly the process; the rehabilitation of those who have been sold for sex is a very long trauma-based process, and it can take up to four years. Nearly always, survivors and victims of human trafficking and sex slavery suffer from some form of abuse. While substance abuse, sexual abuse, mental abuse and/or physical abuse are the most prevalent, many other psychological dysfunctions and cognitive issues may be present themselves as well. Through my experiences, I have found that all of these issues work best by treating them with a specific protocol.

First, their trust must be gained by allowing them time to understand that they are not alone in their plight and that someone else is truly invested in their best interest and not simply patronizing them in order to once again take advantage of them. Only then can true change begin moving them ever closer to becoming the valuable productive citizen in society they at this stage simply don't know how to be. Many in this population have never had an opportunity to know that they count in this life. Codependency, abandonment issues and "poor-old-me" syndrome becomes major issues for many and plagues this population. Fears such as homelessness and the stigmas that attach themselves to this population are devastating. Guilt and shame attaches itself to the lives of these individuals as easily as gum clings to your shoe.

For this group, rehabilitation is a must. We at the Harris County Sheriff's Office under the leadership of Sheriff Adrian Garcia, have opened up a new world of hope and success for the thousands who have come through the We've Been There Done That program.

I'm sure we agree that it appears that we are punishing victims all over again, but that is simply not the case.

By them present in our reentry program they are instead being protected by being kept away from their drug dealers, pimps, sugar daddies, johns and predators long enough to begin deprogramming the damage they have suffered. This is a population that is used to constantly being on the run, chased from one predator to another as a lion would chase a deer until they fall again and again in a perpetual loop of tragedy. It is easier to deprogram these clients while they are in a facility where they do not have access to drugs, pimps, sugar daddies, johns and predators, finally they have the chance to catch a breath and begin to heal.

As their recovery coach, I am able to offer continuous coaching to these individuals for up to five years or as long as the individual would like for me to coach them. The need for case managers is essential. Also desperately needed are facilities that can house these clients for up to two years until they are strong enough and have developed adequate skills to live on their own, while still remaining in an active rehabilitation program.

The We've Been There Done That program offers this population a program of a minimum of ninety to one hundred eighty days in the county jail where they can receive the intensive deprogramming that is needed to separate them from the environment they have been trapped within. After this, they are placed in facilities that help manage their specific needs, i.e., substance abuse, mental abuse, homelessness, etc...

Student interns from the University of Houston-Downtown Criminal Justice Program have also been a great asset to us volunteering to assist with case management in the Harris County jail. Their work with our clients assure when they leave our custody they have exit plans, recovery plans and their life plans are mapped out for them.

Another component of the program is providing services to those victims who have been caught up in criminal activity by following them to state jail where I continue to work with them there and offer continued support even after they have been released.

Not all who have begun the process are willing to go into in-patient facilities. Some wish to remain employed and support their children or family while still attending out-patient treatment options. Based upon my experience I have found that treatment is providing a success rate of up to eighty-five percent.

It needs to be noted that some of this population will experience a few bumps in their road to success, we also must understand that is to be expected. It is absolutely essential that we fund beds for those who have been identified as victims of international or domestic human trafficking. This group is far too familiar with conning, manipulation, lying, stealing and cheating. My experience has shown that the majority of them express sincere guilt about crimes they were forced to commit and want to stop this endless loop but don't know how.

Hurt people hurt other people. What does human trafficking look like? Not all of these victims have criminal histories. They come from every race, gender, age and ethnicity imaginable. The fact is, the face of international and domestic human trafficking has multiple faces, and

unfortunately, we are introduced to many different faces on a daily basis. Many victims do not even realize they have been victims of human trafficking. Allow me to reiterate; hurt people, hurt other people.

Thirty-day substance abuse treatment programs are simply not long enough to address the social, physical, psychological and developmental traumas that torment this population. It takes a lot more than just giving them C.A.R.E. packages of clothing and food. Their need for deprogramming, treatment and assistance is not obligatory, it is mandatory if they are to survive.

Our goal is to stop victims of human trafficking from recidivating back into the criminal justice system and to put them back in the population as productive members with the same unalienable rights those of us who have not victimized too often take for granted.

I am committed for the rest of my life to stay on this battlefield, educating, rehabilitating and teaching the world to appreciate this population while helping as many as I can escape the bondage of human trafficking for the freedom to live free.

I am begging all of you to open up your hearts and minds and to help us fight this great fight help us to save prisoners in this silent war. People should not be for sale.

I am available to speak with anyone who would be interested in first-hand information involving this epidemic. Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with all of you on this issue.

God bless you and may God bless the United States of America.