

September 13, 2023

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Homeland Security Committee, it's an honor to testify here today.

I would like to begin today by showing you a powerful clip from the popular movie SOUND OF FREEDOM.

This scene depicts a moment from my real life I'll never forget. I was working for the Department of Homeland Security out of Calexico, CA, and I can tell you firsthand that the only reason we were able to save this precious little boy was due to the fact that they had to take him across the border at a port of entry checkpoint.

Despite what you may hear from some media sources, human trafficking is absolutely real, and—for the sake of innocent children—it must be dealt with urgently and immediately.

The horrors a child faces as a victim of human trafficking demand that we take action. A child can be sold up to 20 times per day, six days a week for ten years or even longer if they are trafficked as a toddler or infant.

The topic of border security and the policies surrounding it have unfortunately become a type of political football that is used in the larger discussion of our government's immigration policies. But the reality of what is happening at our southern border is not merely a policy debate, it is a humanitarian crisis with real victims.

Just in 2022 alone immigration authorities encountered more than 152,000 unaccompanied minors at or near the U.S.-Mexico border, representing an all-time high. As I will share with you today, many of those children will enter the U.S. and be put at risk of sexual exploitation by human traffickers.

Regardless of ideology or party label, I believe every member of this committee, and good people everywhere, can agree that human trafficking is a plague and an evil that must be eradicated.

Evidence of this can be seen in the response to the movie SOUND OF FREEDOM—based on my life story—which has been a surprise box office success and is sparking a national conversation on child sex slavery and trafficking, the fastest-growing criminal enterprise on earth.

But the growing resolve amongst Americans is also seen in national polling, showing a majority of Americans support President Biden closing the southern border until the humanitarian crisis involving drug smuggling and human trafficking can be properly addressed.<sup>1</sup>

The American people, on all sides of the political aisle, are realizing that ending human trafficking in the U.S. is not part of a political debate, it is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis happening in our country, and on our watch.

The conclusions I offer in this testimony are based on my professional experience as an anti-trafficking operator. After starting my professional career with the CIA, I transferred to the Department of Homeland Security. At the DHS, I spent 12 years as a special agent and undercover operator for Homeland Security Investigations. For 10 of those years, I was combating sex trafficking on the southern border and became one of the country's foremost experts on the issue of trafficking through years of undercover work, research, and investigation.

After leaving the federal government, I have continued the fight against human trafficking. First, as the founder and CEO of the anti-trafficking organization Operation Underground Railroad (O.U.R.), and now as a Senior Advisor for the SPEAR Fund, an organization that funds and collaborates with a coalition of experts, organizations, and concerned citizens from around the globe to end human-trafficking in our time.

Through my experience as a federal agent, CEO of O.U.R., and Senior Advisor for SPEAR Fund I have worked closely with the heads of every U.S. agency whose job it is to find and rescue children being trafficked across the southern border. These agencies under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security include Customs and Border Protection, Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs, and Homeland Security Investigations.

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<sup>1</sup> [Trafalgar Group Polling](#), Conducted April 2022

Our federal agents who work at the southern border are women and men of the highest integrity and dedication. Their efforts protect us daily from the myriad of different dangers found coming into our country. Our agents exist to protect, not to judge, not to discriminate, and not to carry out a political motive. They follow the laws they have sworn to uphold and they deserve a debt of gratitude from each of us as they help keep us safe.

When I last had the honor to testify before Congress I shared how traffickers use our southern border to bring slaves into our country for the sex industry because the United States is one of the highest consumers of child sex abuse content in the world.<sup>2</sup> The US is also one of the wealthiest nations in the world, creating fertile ground for child traffickers who are trying to get their product to this lucrative illicit market.

Through my decade on the border as a human trafficking expert for the federal government, I participated in dozens of cases and operations that uncovered human trafficking rings and discovered human smuggling processes across the border. We were fortunate to rescue many victims and I'm proud that we put so many criminals behind bars.

But despite the success of agents on the ground, one thing has become vividly clear: poor U.S. border security and broken U.S. policy are feeding the growth of human trafficking in the U.S., and empowering international criminal cartels both inside and outside of our borders.

One way this is seen is the absence of physical barriers on our border. While the topic of a border wall has become hotly contested here in Washington D.C. and in the media, the reality is that requiring people to enter our country at actual ports of entry is very effective in combating human trafficking. It can mean the difference between freedom or sexual captivity for a child.

As you saw in the clip from the movie, I have personally seen how ports of entry were responsible for helping rescue a child, catch a sexual predator, and start a chain of events that rescued multiple children from his abuse.

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<sup>2</sup> [THORN.org](http://THORN.org)

On the other hand, I've had heartbreaking conversations with survivors who were trafficked by cartels taking advantage of the miles of unprotected U.S. border. In one case in particular a young woman was brought across the border at an area where no barriers or protections existed. Her captors brought her to New York City where she was sold and raped for money up to 30-40 times a day for five years before eventually escaping.

She shared with me the tragic conclusion that had her captors been forced to attempt crossing into our country at a port of entry she would have had a better chance of being rescued, as opposed to the hell on earth she endured before her escape.

At our points of entry, trained law enforcement officials have the ability to look into the eyes of traffickers and victims. They have technology, training, and instinct on their side to identify victims and hopefully rescue them.

But the success we've seen in interdicting human traffickers at points of entry means nothing if our immigration policies allow traffickers to flaunt legal loopholes.

Recently, members of Congress sounded the alarm on information that the government has lost track of 85,000 minors that crossed the border unaccompanied<sup>3</sup>, and The New York Times reported that the Department of Health and Human Services has lost contact with thousands of children who were released to "sponsors", and are now feared to be at risk for exploitation.<sup>4</sup>

In May, U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered an average of 435 unaccompanied minors per day,<sup>5</sup> while in June of this year alone, the Biden administration released 344 kids to non-related adults in the U.S.<sup>6</sup>—most of whom already had multiple children in their care. These children are prime targets for traffickers—for sex or labor.

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<sup>3</sup> *Newsweek*, Jul. 14, 2023

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, Apr. 17, 2023

<sup>5</sup> U.S. CBP May Operational Update, Jun. 20, 2023

<sup>6</sup> *NBC News*, Jun. 6, 2023

To fight the human trafficking battle most effectively, we must put aside politics. Oftentimes politicians and the media try to make border enforcement and pro-migration positions mutually exclusive. That does not need to be the case. Our country can have a robust and welcoming policy about immigration, but it must be in a way that's legal and doesn't leave loopholes for criminals to hurt children and sentence them to a life of horror.

Ending human trafficking in the U.S. would create huge progress in ending human trafficking across the globe. One of the first steps in accomplishing that is securing our border and fixing our immigration policies. As we have seen from the reaction to the movie SOUND OF FREEDOM and polling, the American people from all political ideologies are ready to tackle this scourge.

I ask that this administration and its agencies show the same resolve, put politics aside, and immediately take the action needed to begin securing our border and ending the horrible policies that are only serving to put innocent children at risk.

We have seen the success that is possible when our nation acts with a unified spirit against evil people and evil ideologies, and by God's grace that same spirit can bring an end to human trafficking.

Sincerely, Tim Ballard