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Introduction

Good morning, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and distinguished members of the Task Force. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the lodging industry's efforts to prevent human trafficking as we prepare for major events that will draw millions of visitors to the United States. My name is Eliza McCoy, and I serve as Vice President of Programs and Impact at the American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation (AHLAF). In this role, I lead AHLA's human trafficking awareness and prevention initiatives.

Prior to joining AHLA, I served for over 15 years in law enforcement and nonprofit leadership focused on child safety and anti-trafficking programs. As an investigator in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, and later leading outreach, training, and prevention efforts at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, I have seen how criminals exploit victims and the lives they shatter, and I have devoted my career to helping victims overcome their trauma. I have the privilege of working for the hotel industry where preventing human trafficking is a core value and a collective effort across the industry.

It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss how the hotel and lodging sector is proactively preventing human trafficking and collaborating with government partners, industry leaders, law enforcement, victims' rights organizations, and survivors of trafficking to secure our communities ahead of the 2026 World Cup, the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the Paralympics and the America 250 celebrations.

AHLA and the AHLA Foundation

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) is the unified voice of America's hotels, representing every segment of the lodging sector, from family-owned inns and franchises to iconic global brands and real estate investment trusts. The AHLA Foundation is the national charitable affiliate of AHLA, dedicated to advancing the lodging industry's role as a force for good in communities across the country. I am proud to share with you that there is no cause more universally embraced by our member companies than anti-human trafficking efforts. The AHLA Foundation is the national leader in the hotel industry's efforts against human trafficking, working to equip every property and every employee with the training, tools, and support needed to identify and prevent this heinous crime. AHLAF drives the industry's commitment to safety, security, and responsibility through its flagship No Room for Trafficking (NRFT) initiative, survivor support funding, and a wide network of public- and private-sector partnerships.

In addition to this critical prevention work, the Foundation advances the economic and social well-being of the lodging workforce through career development programs, research, education, and community investment. Guided by strong collaboration across hotel brands, ownership groups, service providers, and government agencies, the Foundation creates pathways to meaningful careers, builds safer hospitality environments, and reinforces the industry's role as a trusted partner in every community it serves.

AHLA Foundation's "No Room for Trafficking" Initiative

In 2019, the AHLA Foundation, in partnership with our member companies, dedicated leaders, law enforcement partners, and expert organizations, launched the "No Room for Trafficking" (NRFT) initiative as a comprehensive, industry-wide program to train hotel employees to identify the signs

of trafficking and to report activity to the proper authorities.¹ No Room for Trafficking sends a loud and clear message: we do not tolerate trafficking in hotels.² The national program unites the entire hotel sector behind shared goals and standards. NRFT's mission is to (1) elevate the issue of human trafficking and industry efforts to prevent it; (2) educate industry employers and employees to identify and report suspected trafficking in hotels and communities nationwide, and; (3) empower survivors with the support they need to thrive.³

Critically, AHLAF provides members with free, practical tools including: accessible training for employers and employees, model anti-trafficking policies, indicator signage, and a comprehensive Member Resource Guide detailing how to implement training, establish reporting protocols, and connect with law enforcement and victim service providers.⁴ We also formed strategic partnerships with leading anti-trafficking and child protection groups including ECPAT-USA (now PACT), Polaris, and Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) to ensure our materials reflect best practices and to coordinate our industry training with broader national efforts. Additionally, the Foundation has worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security's Blue Campaign, which has identified hospitality as a critical frontline sector for Trafficking detection.⁵ Over many years, we have collaborated with DHS to promote the Blue Campaign's Hospitality Toolkit, including multilingual posters, indicator cards, and response protocols tailored for hotels, and we proudly participate in DHS's annual #WearBlueDay awareness initiative each January during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.⁶

These partnerships underscore that our industry's approach is holistic and aligned with federal efforts: every level of our organizations, from corporate headquarters to front-desk staff, is engaged in recognizing the signs of trafficking and responding in concert with law enforcement.

Training and Impact

A cornerstone of No Room for Trafficking is a free, comprehensive and tailored training program available to all hotel employees, developed in collaboration with Marriott International and PACT. The flagship course, "Your Role in Preventing Human Trafficking: Recognize the Signs," can be taken online or delivered in-person and is designed to integrate seamlessly into hotel training systems. To maximize accessibility, it is offered in dozens of languages and formats, ensuring that employees at every property, from luxury resorts to roadside motels, can receive this critical education.

Since 2020, this training, provided at no cost to any hotel associate or interested party, has been completed more than 2.5 million times, an unprecedented scale of reach made possible by industry-

¹ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking* (NRFT), AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/nrft/>.

² PACT, *Hotel Industry Unites on New Campaign to Fight Human Trafficking* (June 26, 2019), PACT, <https://www.wearepact.org/blog/2019/6/26/hotel-industry-unites-on-new-campaign-to-fight-human-trafficking>.

³ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking* (NRFT), AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/nrft/>.

⁴ PACT, *Recognize the Signs* (training course), PACT, <https://courses.wearepact.org/recognize-the-signs>.

⁵ American Hotel & Lodging Association, *Human Trafficking Prevention Partners*, AHLA, <https://www.ahla.com/news/human-trafficking-prevention-partners>.

⁶ AHLA Foundation, *AHLA & AHLA Foundation Honor National Human Trafficking Prevention Month; Announce Major Survivor Fund Donation*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/ahla-ahla-foundation-honor-national-human-trafficking-prevention-month-announce-major-survivor-fund-donation>.

wide commitment and unwavering support. Each of those completions means another set of eyes and ears on the ground, better equipped to identify potential trafficking and act swiftly.

One powerful example of the impact of employee awareness occurred at a hotel in Los Angeles. A young woman in a lobby bathroom told the hotel's staff she was being held against her will. Trained employees immediately assessed the circumstances and recalled the indicators they had learned through the No Room for Trafficking program. They acted decisively and helped a victim when she needed it most.

To ensure training translates into action, the NRFT initiative also emphasizes ongoing awareness and continuous improvement. AHLA distributes "back-of-house" signage, discreet posters for employee-only areas, that list common trafficking indicators and the hotline number to report suspected trafficking.⁷ Hotels display these in break rooms and housekeeping closets as daily reminders that staff are on the front lines to help save lives.

Each year, AHLAF hosts an NRFT Summit, which convenes hotel executives, security directors, operations leaders, survivors, law enforcement leaders, and experts to share best practices and emerging trends.⁸ These meetings, alongside year-round webinars and regional events, create a platform for continuous learning to enhance our industry's awareness and protocols. Our message, reinforced from the boardroom to the break room, is that every hotel employee can help in the fight against trafficking, and together we are making our hotels inhospitable to traffickers, while protecting guests, employees, and local communities.

The NRFT Survivor Fund

In addition to prevention efforts, the lodging industry also invests considerably in support for those who have survived this terrible crime. We know that identifying a victim in a hotel is only the first step; true success means that person can escape their trafficker and rebuild their life with dignity. That is why in 2022, the AHLA Foundation expanded its efforts by establishing the No Room For Trafficking Survivor Fund, an industry-wide program devoted to supporting human trafficking survivors through leading community-based organizations nationwide.⁹ In my role at the AHLA Foundation, I have the privilege of administering this fund, which provides grants that deliver long-term support and economic empowerment for survivors. The NRFT Survivor Fund was launched with contributions from major hotel companies and has quickly grown into a multi-million-dollar resource. There is no greater moral cause for hoteliers than preventing human trafficking and supporting its victims, and I am proud of the impact we are having on the lives of these incredible people.

Since the inception of the fund, we have distributed millions of dollars in grants to various organizations which provide direct resources to help survivors move from crisis towards stability, from safe housing and childcare, to counseling, job readiness, and preparation for sustainable

⁷ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking Member Resource Guide*, AHLA Foundation (PDF), <https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/NRFT-%20Member%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>.

⁸ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking Summit 2025*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/event/no-room-for-trafficking-summit-2025>.

⁹ American Hotel & Lodging Association, *AHLA Statement on Human Trafficking Awareness Training and Recognition Act*, AHLA, <https://www.ahla.com/news/ahla-statement-human-trafficking-awareness-training-recognition-act>.

employment. These are tangible outcomes that change lives. The grants have helped to support more than 3,200 survivors in 18 states across the country. Some of those individuals are now employed in hospitality, starting new careers in a trauma-informed environment. The Survivor Fund has created an unprecedented platform for collaboration in support of survivors. We are not only training our own employees to spot trafficking; we are investing in the long-term wellbeing of survivors, helping them find stability and employment, including in our sector. This holistic approach, combining prevention with survivor support, is how the lodging industry is striving to break the cycle of trafficking.

Trafficking Risks During Major Events and Industry Preparation

The United States is set to host the FIFA World Cup, the nation's semiquincentennial celebration, America 250, and the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles over the next couple of years. These events will showcase the best of America. However, as this Task Force recognizes, they also pose unique security challenges, and human trafficking is among the threats that demand our vigilance. Sporting events and mass gatherings can attract illicit business, including commercial sex trafficking.¹⁰ Traffickers are opportunistic: they seek to capitalize on the surge of travelers and the relative anonymity of crowded venues and hotels.¹¹ However, while major events often draw attention to human trafficking, focusing solely on a single day obscures the fact that this is a year-round problem. The same traffickers active during big sporting events continue their crimes long after the games end. Large events, including the World Cup and Olympics, tend to spark heightened concern and law enforcement action, but trafficking is not necessarily driven by these events, it simply becomes more visible.¹²

The heightened focus on trafficking during large events must be channeled into effective, lasting solutions rather than short-term alarm. Polaris, which operated the National Human Trafficking Hotline for the past 18 years, emphasizes that portraying a single event as “the largest trafficking incident” can be misleading, the reality is that trafficking is a 365-day-a-year problem that exists in *every* city and *every* state, before, during, and after the event.¹³ Major events are a critical opportunity to strengthen our long-term antitrafficking infrastructure. They can also leverage the intense public attention to drive sustainable improvements, better data collection on trafficking, enhanced coordination among agencies, and addressing underlying vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit.¹⁴

The hotel industry is embracing this approach. Well in advance of many major events, AHLA and our partners work to ensure heightened readiness on the ground, while integrating anti-trafficking planning into the broader security strategy. Over the past several years, AHLAF has engaged with event committees and NGOs. We have teamed up with major brands and leading international organizations for several past Super Bowls to ensure property-level teams are trained and ready in

¹⁰ Polaris, *The Super Bowl Myth* (Feb. 2016), Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2016/02/the-super-bowl-myth/>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Sebastien Malo, *Is the Super Bowl Really the U.S.'s Biggest Sex Trafficking Magnet?*, Reuters (Feb. 1, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/is-the-super-bowl-really-the-uss-biggest-sex-trafficking-magnet-idUSKBN1FL6A0/>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Polaris, *World Cup 2026: An Opportunity to Lead on Human Trafficking* (June 2022), Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2022/06/world-cup-2026-an-opportunity-to-lead-on-human-trafficking/>.

advance of these events.¹⁵ The initiatives have brought together hoteliers, local law enforcement, and survivor advocates to raise awareness and distribute educational materials to prepare the host city.

Similarly, over the last 18 months, we have worked with state and local governments and law enforcement agencies to implement mandatory human trafficking training laws. Currently, more than a dozen states mandate hotel employees receive human trafficking awareness training, and we are working with others to offer our collaboration, technical assistance and industry-wide networks to support the ongoing planning for 2026 World Cup cities and the LA28 Olympics.

Several of our member companies are also active participants in global efforts, including serving the FIFA Human Rights Advisory Council, reinforcing the industry's long-standing commitment to prevention and victim protection. AHLA is proudly working directly with the intergovernmental World Cup Task Force to ensure federal stakeholders are aware of, and able to utilize, existing hotel-industry training and resources, and we remain ready to support coordinated, industry-wide collaboration with local agencies in each host city.

Hotels are also taking proactive steps to help prevent human trafficking and support victims. In addition to mandatory training for staff, our members provide emergency housing for victims, donate space for proactive law enforcement operations, and actively engage with local governments and service providers to strengthen response efforts. Many hotel companies also implement enhanced measures during high-risk periods, including refresher trainings and pre-event briefings, increased security presence, stricter guest-verification protocols, coordination with local police task forces and the FBI, and widespread dissemination of the National Human Trafficking Hotline across employee and public areas. These combined actions reflect the industry's commitment to safeguarding guests, employees, and communities year-round, not only during marquee events.

The lodging industry is fully committed to working hand-in-hand with this Task Force, DHS, DOJ, local law enforcement, and NGOs so that these milestone events are remembered for sportsmanship and national unity. We see the upcoming years as a crucial opportunity to demonstrate U.S. leadership in combating trafficking on a global stage.

Challenges and Recommendations

The hospitality industry plays a frontline role in preventing and detecting human trafficking, yet several operational and structural challenges persist. Training and vigilance vary significantly across alternative lodging types, which often lack the same safeguards and expectations placed on traditional hotels. Even when warning signs are identified, response pathways are not always clear, as many properties lack streamlined coordination with law enforcement and survivor-support organizations. This gap can delay responses, create confusion, and limit aid. Similarly, communities frequently lack year-round survivor support infrastructure such as safe housing and

¹⁵ AHLA Foundation, *AHLA & AHLA Foundation Honor National Human Trafficking Prevention Month; Announce Major Survivor Fund Donation*, AHLA Foundation (last visited Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/ahla-ahla-foundation-honor-national-human-trafficking-prevention-month-announce-major-survivor-fund-donation/>

specialized investigative teams, creating vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit long after a major event ends.

To address these challenges, we recommend adopting consistent, industry-wide standards for training and anti-trafficking policies across all lodging providers, ensuring no weak links in prevention efforts. Hotels should be supported with a clear and streamlined reporting process that effectively leverages the resources of both law enforcement and survivor advocacy organizations. Finally, long-term capacity building, including investment in emergency housing and specialized law enforcement units, will strengthen community readiness throughout the year, not only during high-profile events. With these improvements in place, the lodging industry can remain a strong and reliable partner in preventing trafficking, protecting victims, and supporting prosecution of offenders before exploitation takes root.

Conclusion

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and members of the Task Force, thank you for the opportunity to share my perspectives on human trafficking prevention with you today. The American hotel industry is fully committed to setting the national standard in the effort to stop human trafficking. I am proud to represent an industry that is confronting this difficult issue head-on with resolve and compassion. As we approach the World Cup, America 250, and the Olympics, we continue to stand united with law enforcement, survivor support organizations, and policymakers to ensure these memorable events are not exploited by those who would prey on the vulnerable. Hotels are a key part of the solution to protect our guests, our employees, and our communities. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.