



COMMITTEE ON

**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY**

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas**

Full Committee Hearing – “Data Challenges Impacting Human Trafficking Research and Development of Anti-Trafficking Technological Tools”

February 8, 2022

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Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson for holding today’s hearing to explore the role of science and technology in disrupting human trafficking. And thank you to our expert witnesses for your participation. I look forward to your testimony to learn more about how we can use research to improve anti-trafficking policies.

And thank you, Ms. Darnton, for testifying before us again today on this very important topic. I look forward to building off what we learned from you during a hearing we held two years ago on this same topic. We are glad to have you back with us here again today.

Human trafficking is a crime that is often described as “hidden in plain sight” as it can be difficult to detect the warning signs and many victims are afraid to come forward. Often human trafficking criminals operate in public places such as airports and hotels as well as public forums online. While these victims may not be shackled, human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery.

Human trafficking is a global problem and it affects every state, making it difficult to address. And each state faces its own challenges. In my home state of Oklahoma, the increase in crime has become particularly problematic—including among Oklahoma’s Indigenous populations. In recent years, Oklahoma’s Indigenous populations have been affected by concerning high rates of human trafficking, murder, and abduction. We also face challenges from illegal cannabis growing operations, which have been linked to suspected human trafficking networks. I’m hoping some of the research we address today can touch on how to handle these challenges.

In 2014, the International Labor Organization estimated that human trafficking was a \$150 billion industry worldwide. Eight years later, this outdated estimation is still being widely cited to describe the current state of human trafficking impacts around the globe. This is in part due to a lack of new data and coordinated data sharing. But without updated and accurate data, it is difficult to understand the full extent of this problem.

One of the reasons I enjoy serving on the Science Committee is our ability to come together and focus on solutions to some of the world's biggest challenges. And combatting human trafficking is just that. It is an issue that cuts across multiple jurisdictions and federal agencies. And research and scientific analysis have an important role to play.

As members of the Science Committee, we can help target investments to address research gaps and advance technologies to help law enforcement, industry, and NGO efforts to fight human trafficking. Further investments in research can ensure we are most efficiently and effectively utilizing data and collaborating with stakeholders.

Strategic investments in new and emerging technology tools such as artificial intelligence transform how we approach this problem. AI can perform large-scale data analysis to detect suspicious financial trends and utilize facial recognition technologies to match victim identities with missing person notices. Continued investments into AI basic research innovations is just one example of how technology can be deployed to fight this deplorable crime.

It is vital that we do not turn a blind eye to human trafficking in our own communities and around the globe. We must work together to support research and technology development to end human trafficking for good.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.