



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER AND MARITIME SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

FOR A HEARING ENTITLED

**“HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: UNDERSTANDING FEDERAL EFFORTS
TO STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING”**

PRESENTED ON

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**Statement of John Gore
Acting Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
Committee on Homeland Security**

United States House of Representatives

**For a Hearing Entitled:
“Hidden in Plain Sight: Understanding Federal Efforts to Stop Human Trafficking”**

**Presented on
September 26, 2018**

Chairwoman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, and Members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Department of Justice’s (Department) extensive efforts to combat human trafficking in all its forms. The Department is deeply committed to seeking justice on behalf of victims and survivors of this destructive crime and holding perpetrators accountable. We appreciate the opportunity to highlight the significant momentum of our counter-trafficking efforts and the strategies that we are implementing to make them even more effective. We work to prosecute human traffickers, build interagency alliances to combat human trafficking and to assist survivors.

Human trafficking is often referred to as modern-day slavery in which victims are denied their freedom. Victims of human trafficking can endure horrific psychological and physical abuse, including violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse, mental manipulation, malnutrition, and neglect.

It is hard to contemplate this kind of cruelty – and shocking to contemplate its scope. Sadly, human trafficking is widespread: in the hospitals where we receive care; in the hotels where we stay; in the restaurants where we eat; in the airports, bus stations, and train stations where we travel; in the truck stops we drive past; in the cities, large and small, poor and prosperous, that we live in; and, of course, online. Unfortunately, there is no indication that the problem is abating. From 2010 to 2014, the National Center For Missing And Exploited Children reported a 846% increase in reports of suspected child sex trafficking to the CyberTipline. The increase in reports is likely fueled, in part, by the widespread use of the internet to recruit and advertise vulnerable and at-risk victims. As we continue to raise awareness about human trafficking, we expect to see an increase in the rate of detection and reporting.

Human trafficking not only devastates lives, it also undermines the safety of our communities, the integrity of our borders, the vitality of our economy, and the rule of law. For this reason, the Attorney General has declared the fight against human trafficking to be one of the Department’s highest priorities. The Department’s Crime Reduction and Public Safety Strategy

has called for “aggressive and coordinated” efforts “to deter those who violate our borders and subject others to forced labor, involuntary servitude, sex trafficking, and other forms of modern-day slavery.”

The Department of Justice is intensely focused on holding traffickers criminally accountable for their actions. In doing so, the Department hopes to deter and prevent future crimes by declaring their conduct intolerable in a nation founded on ideals of individual rights and the rule of law. We are certain that to succeed in this mission we must continue to advance survivor-centered strategies that enable victims and witnesses, who are often silenced by fear, to come forward and aid authorities in bringing perpetrators to justice.

The Department of Justice continues to prosecute unprecedented numbers of human traffickers. Last year alone, we secured a record 499 trafficking convictions – a 14% increase over the previous year – and we filed a record 282 cases against 553 defendants. The Department is continuing to use the array of powerful statutes Congress has given us to pursue human traffickers. Our efforts include investigating and prosecuting *all* perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law: not only the traffickers who recruit victims and then cruelly exert control over their lives, but also the customers who patronize those victims, the hotel owners who profit by participating in trafficking ventures – *and* the facilitators of online trafficking who profit from advertising commercial sex.

Through our strong partnerships within the Department of Justice’s components, we have successfully prosecuted human trafficking cases. Our success is attributed to collaboration between: the United States Attorney’s Offices, the Civil Rights Division’s Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, the Criminal Division’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, the FBI, and our Office of Justice Programs, which supports anti-trafficking task forces, victim assistance grant programs, research studies, community policing efforts, and resource publications. Each of these partners within the Department brings highly specialized expertise in distinct aspects of the wide array of threats we encounter. The specialized expertise involves varying combinations of sex trafficking and labor trafficking domestically and internationally, exploiting both adults and minors, and perpetrated by a range of isolated individuals, loosely affiliated networks, domestic gangs, and transnational criminal organizations. In addition, we are increasingly leveraging the specialized expertise of the Department’s organized crime, financial crime, and cyber-crime units to further enhance the impact of these trafficking prosecutions.

We have also achieved these results through our partnerships with other Federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security’s Homeland Security Investigations, the Department of Labor’s Office of Inspector General and Wage and Hour Division, the Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service, and the Department of Health and Human Services. In addition to our federal enforcement partnerships, we rely extensively on our mission-critical alliances with state, local, and tribal law enforcement. We also depend on faith-based organizations, and non-governmental victim service providers who earn the trust of those at risk, supporting them in finding the courage to come forward and cooperate with law enforcement to investigate and prosecute the human traffickers.

The Department of Justice is continuing to lead groundbreaking enforcement initiatives that have significantly expanded our ability to bring high-impact trafficking prosecutions that dismantle transnational criminal organizations. The Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team (ACTeam) Initiative, organizes interagency teams composed of federal agents and prosecutors in select Districts to develop high-impact trafficking cases in coordination with national subject matter experts. The results of the ACTeam Initiative have been successful. In Phase I of the ACTeam Initiative, prosecutions more than *doubled* in ACTeam Districts, compared to far more modest gains elsewhere. Phase II, which is still ongoing, is producing promising results—including a significant prosecution charging 38 defendants with operating an extensive transnational sex trafficking enterprise that exploited hundreds of Thai women across the United States.

The U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Human Trafficking Enforcement Initiative enables us to bring high-impact prosecutions against transnational trafficking enterprises that operate across the U.S.-Mexico border. Through the U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Human Trafficking Enforcement Initiative, U.S. and Mexican anti-trafficking authorities exchange leads, evidence, strategic intelligence, tactical analytics, and advanced expertise in survivor-centered enforcement strategies through direct operational coordination channels. This work has enhanced the capacity of both U.S. and Mexican law enforcement to initiate high-impact prosecutions aimed at dismantling human trafficking networks operating across the U.S.-Mexico border. By employing the capabilities of our international law enforcement counterparts and streamlining coordination of interrelated investigations – ones with victims, witnesses, evidence, continuing criminal conduct, associated targets, and fugitive defendants in common – this Initiative has significantly expanded our ability to identify, interdict, and dismantle brutal trafficking enterprises. Because of this Initiative, we are bringing traffickers to justice, removing victims' children from the traffickers' control, and helping survivors rebuild their lives.

The Department has successfully prosecuted human trafficking related cases in both Mexico and the United States, including U.S. federal prosecutions of over 170 defendants in multiple cases in Georgia, New York, Florida, and Texas, in addition to numerous Mexican federal and state prosecutions of associated sex traffickers. Just last year, we convicted all eight members of a notorious sex trafficking organization that lured dozens of vulnerable young women and girls on false promises, smuggled them into the United States, compelled them into prostitution in New York, Georgia, and Alabama for over a decade, and laundered the criminal proceeds back to Mexico. We conducted a coordinated, simultaneous takedown on both sides of the border, then secured the extradition of five defendants to the United States, with the assistance of the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs, to face multiple human trafficking, organized crime, alien smuggling, money laundering, and related charges. A few months ago, the United States secured the extradition of four human trafficking defendants apprehended in Mexico as a result of another bilateral investigation and prosecution that culminated in a 23-count indictment charging eight defendants with operating an extensive transnational sex-trafficking enterprise that lured young women and girls on false promises then compelled them into prostitution for the traffickers' profit using physical and sexual violence, threats, and psychological coercion.

We are continuing to break new ground by building interagency alliances to combat human trafficking from all angles. We are working with partners to detect forced labor in the importation of goods and leveraging drug enforcement partners to disrupt opioid-based trafficking schemes that manipulate victims' fears of opiate withdrawal to compel them into prostitution, perpetuating both the opioid crisis and the scourge of sex trafficking. As our anti-trafficking efforts continue to gain momentum, we remain keenly aware of the many challenges that lie ahead. We are committed to strengthening strategic partnerships and advancing innovative approaches that will enable us to make our fight against human trafficking more effective than ever before.

Our anti-trafficking efforts extend beyond prosecutions. The Department's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) administers the largest amount of federal funding dedicated to assisting survivors of human trafficking in the United States, receiving \$77 million in FY 2018 funding to do so. In addition to funding victim service providers across the country, the Department funds 29 anti-trafficking task forces comprised of local, state, tribal, and federal criminal justice components, victim service providers, and community- and faith-based organizations that together ensure that trafficking victims are proactively identified and referred for appropriate services and offenders' cases are investigated and prosecuted. The Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) also funds the development of guidebooks and publications on human trafficking, including recent publications on trafficking at the U.S. southwest border and on combating child sex trafficking.¹ DOJ-funded organizations have provided direct services, ranging from housing to legal services to case management, to a record number of trafficking victims. Between July 2016 and June 2017, DOJ trafficking grantees reported assisting a total of 8,003 clients, greatly exceeding the total number of clients served during the entire first 10 years of our anti-trafficking program, as well as training more than 56,000 individuals on how to identify and assist trafficking survivors. The Department provides extensive training in survivor-centered, trauma-informed anti-trafficking strategies, often drawing on the expertise of survivors themselves, because stabilizing survivors and restoring their rights is not only our statutory duty under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act; it is also the key to our success in bringing traffickers to justice for heinous crimes that go unpunished when victims are too terrified to come forward. We are actively training partners nationwide to utilize the additional statutory tools enacted in April in the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today, I look forward to further discussions on these issues.

¹ See, e.g., *Below Ten: Combating Drugs, Guns, and Human Trafficking at the U.S. Southwest Border* (<https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p369-pub.pdf>). We also have publications available on child sex trafficking (<https://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P342> and <https://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P318>).