

Written Statement of

**Bill Woolf
Executive Director
Just Ask Trafficking Prevention Foundation
McLean, Virginia**

Before the

*House Rules Committee
Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process*

December 11, 2019

Solving an Epidemic: Human Trafficking in America

Some of the information and facts contained herein are derived from training and research, but all information and observations are supported by personal and professional experiences as a practitioner in the field, as well as actual investigations and interviews during the course of my tenure as a human trafficking investigator.

Problem

Human Trafficking is a crime that cuts across all races, ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic classes. Traffickers prey on the vulnerabilities of their intended victims, depriving them of their human dignity and worth for the purposes of profit, regardless of the victim's country of birth, background, or age¹. It is a crime that does not discriminate and has increasingly shifted to preying upon the youth in our communities. A crime that was once thought to target intended victims from low socio-economic classes has become disturbingly more prevalent in some of the most affluent suburbs throughout the United States—highlighting some of the lesser-known social determinants which lead to the exploitation of our young people. It is of note that victims can be exploited in their own states, neighborhoods, schools, churches, and even their own homes. The reality is that our children, one of the most vulnerable and sought-after populations by traffickers, can be exploited on a routine basis by these profit-driven predators and yet may still be coming home every night for dinner, sleeping in their own beds, and going to school every day. Traffickers in some sense are highly sophisticated, deploying new methods of carrying out their criminal enterprises in an effort to thwart efforts by law enforcement to detect, interdict, and dismantle their operations. One of the largest problems faced by the community of professionals working to eradicate human trafficking is misidentification, thereby leaving a large

¹ United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report (2013), <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt>

percentage of victims who have endured a great deal of trauma and victimization never being formally identified as victims—they do not receive the services and intervention that they need to help them recover and become productive members of society. Often, we become reliant on law enforcement to fix criminal problems; however, the issue of human trafficking requires a multi-disciplinary, multi-sector, collaborative approach to truly be effective in preventing the crime.

Most people do not believe that human trafficking will ever affect them directly or that it is an international crime that does not have domestic victims—the “this does not happen here” mentality. The unsettling truth is that every community and every home in America is at risk to falling victim to human trafficking; the most vulnerable group being our children. Human trafficking has become an epidemic in the United States. The United States Department of State recently released its annual Trafficking in Persons report, and the U.S. was in the top three countries for victims of origin. Some studies, like that from the Global Slavery Index in 2018, estimate that on any given day in the U.S., about 400,000 individuals are being trafficked in the commercial sex industry and through forced, unfair labor. Because of the lack of acceptance that human trafficking is a reality in our country, many victims, and the families driven to protect them, adopt the belief that “this could never happen to me.” The lack of awareness as to how traffickers scout, manipulate, and trap vulnerable people into a life of exploitation and servitude presents a cumbersome, multi-dimensional problem for law enforcement, educators, social services, government officials, and anti-trafficking organizations alike. One can only address a threat appropriately when they are aware the threat exists and fully understand the methodology of the exploiters, social determinants of victims and offenders, and the impact on the person and society. The white van abducting our children from street corners and forcing them into a life of prostitution is very rare. Rather, it is smooth words and empty promises that trap and manipulate at-risk populations, forcing them into a life of exploitation. And as the traffickers exploit technology, specifically social media, to enhance their recruiting abilities, their presence in the lives of even the most remote communities becomes more of a reality, which calls for increased vigilance on the part of parents, governments, and society as a whole. It is important to have an understanding of what human trafficking looks like here in the United States to be able to safeguard those within our borders. Awareness of the issue and acceptance that those living in our communities are vulnerable is one of the principle steps in combating human trafficking.

Manifestations of Human Trafficking

The reality is that human trafficking presents in various forms, making this a complex issue to understand and address. However, one thing is fairly consistent: human trafficking does not occur in illegal underground industries hidden from sight; rather most of the illegal operations are facilitated through legitimate commerce. The accessibility of “slave labor” in which the demand is usually met through the criminal operations of traffickers, is more prevalent in today’s

society than it ever has been in the past. Regardless of whether one lives in middle-class suburbia, wealthy downtown business districts, or subsidized housing, trafficking is most likely occurring in plain sight. Additionally, there are “consumers” within each of these types of neighborhoods. More importantly, the children that are living in each of these environments are also vulnerable to the traffickers’ deceptions.

Sex trafficking instances manifest themselves in four basic forms: brothel networks, pimp-controlled, family-controlled, and gang-controlled. Brothel networks are found in the form of what appears to be legitimate commercial establishments, or they can be found in residential neighborhoods as well. Throughout the United States, law enforcement continues to uncover residential brothels in “well-to-do” gated communities that are not known for being infested with criminal conduct. Within these brothel networks, which appear in many forms, victims usually remain in one location for a determinate period of time, typically one week, and then they are relocated. The victims are forced to remain onsite for the duration and endure long hours as well as inadequate and inhumane living conditions under the threat of violence to themselves or their families while engaging in commercial sex. Some of these brothel networks can be localized within a geographic region, such as northern Virginia, or they can be multi-state or multi-national criminal enterprises, often preying on the vulnerabilities of foreign nationals who are unfamiliar with the laws of the United States.

Pimp-controlled scenarios have become an exponentially greater threat, as they are shifting toward recruiting younger victims. Recognizing that the average age of induction into commercial sex in the United States is fourteen (14) years old, it is evident that pimps have resorted to inducing and maintaining younger victims than in the past. Pimps typically advertise using internet-based methods similar to the former website Backpage.com. Since Backpage was seized by law enforcement, several new sites have been created and are currently active, facilitating the sale of commercial sex and ultimately sex trafficking². These traffickers use hotel rooms and common forms of public transportation to harbor and transport trafficking victims. They may move juveniles to and from multiple states in an effort to maximize their profit and avoid law enforcement detection.

One of the most disturbing, but rapidly emerging trends is that of gang-controlled sex trafficking. Gangs, commonly believed to be all about violence, have now learned that violence simply serves a means to an end—a profitable crime. Gangs have learned that sex trafficking, particularly of minors, is a low-risk, high-yield criminal enterprise that adequately funds their gang operations throughout the United States and around the world. Drawing from their reputation of violence, often glorified through Hollywood, gangs can use the “threat” of violence as a means of control for these vulnerable and uninformed youth.

² One example is the similarly named www.bedpage.com which has the same layout and format of Backpage. There are several other sites which have also become active.

Social Determinants of the Victims

Traffickers look for three (3) things when selecting a potential victim: accessibility, suggestibility, and vulnerability. Accessibility refers to the traffickers' ability to gain and maintain access to an intended victim during the course of recruiting and manipulating them into an exploitive scenario. As previously mentioned, this is typically accomplished through social media and other electronic communications platforms. Online, traffickers have continuous, often unsupervised access to their intended victims. Suggestibility refers to the societal influences of the intended victim that can be used to "normalize" the exploitive behavior. In sex trafficking, this is accomplished through the false glamorization of the commercial sex industry, which is not accompanied by education regarding the very physical, emotional, and psychological impact sex work can have on a person. With regards to exploitive labor, or labor trafficking, this can be accomplished by *suggesting* that this is the only option available to a person in a vulnerable state—a convicted felon who struggles to find employment, a foreign national who has to provide life-dependent medicine to a family member in their country of origin, or many other scenarios. Vulnerability is the factor in a victim's life that traffickers use to leverage that person—vulnerability and suggestibility are often interconnected. These vulnerabilities often become the social determinants which lead to victimization and should be the focus of prevention efforts.

Traffickers often focus their recruitment efforts on children because of particular vulnerabilities that impressionable young people possess. These vulnerabilities, or social determinants, fall into four main categories: economic vulnerabilities, victims of prior abuse (sexual or physical), situational vulnerabilities (homeless or runaway children), and "other at-risk," which includes children with low self-esteem, attention-seeking youth, children from homes lacking stability, youth who identify as LGBTQ+, or children who lack an understanding of healthy relationships. It is essential to understand that these "other at-risk" youth are the children in every school, every neighborhood, every church and youth group, and potentially in any home across America. Family dynamics have changed over the past few decades, and traffickers have taken note, exploiting those changes to draw young people into a life of servitude through false promises and coercion. In these instances, traffickers never have to provide their victims with monetary rewards; rather they offer love and affection to a child who is not being fulfilled at home³.

It can be challenging to sympathize or understand how a person is coerced or induced into engaging in commercial sex or exploitive labor by someone simply taking advantage of their personal vulnerabilities. Regardless, it is important to remember that victimization is the same, whether physical force or the more pervasive forms of mental manipulation is utilized. Arguably, coercion to induce someone into a life of servitude and slavery delivers a greater degree of

³ Rao, Smriti, & Christina Presenti, *Understanding Human Trafficking Origin: A Cross-Country Empirical Analysis, in Feminist Economics*

psychological damage because the person was manipulated to believe that they were complicit in their own victimization. In situations where the victim believes that they agreed to engage in the conduct, there is an increase in self-blame and personal shame on the victim's part⁴. This complex trauma is difficult to clinically diagnosis and effectively treat, often frustrating the child's treatment plan and hindering progress to restoring the child to a state of normalcy, as generally accepted by society. It becomes increasingly complex when the community supporting that victim-survivor does not understand the problem either, leading to further shame, isolation, and judgment.

Traffickers employ a heavy dose of psychological manipulation as a means of power and control over their victims. As a result, the victims are made to believe that they consented to their own victimization, and in some instances, they believe that they themselves are the offenders. In this way, trafficking victims rarely seek help or report these cases to the proper authorities⁵. Victims of human trafficking often encounter professionals (law enforcement, social services, counselors, educators, etc) for other reported problems. Due to a lack of adequate training available for these frontline professionals, they often misidentify potential victims, extending their period of exploitation.

Studies show that a strong determinant of a child's vulnerability to trafficking is their home situation. One homeless youth organization partnered with researchers at Arizona State University to investigate the prevalence of sex trafficking experienced among homeless youths who received services from the organization and two community-based organizations like it. Their study revealed that 35.8% of the 215 victims they surveyed reported a history of sex trafficking. The nonprofit non-governmental organization Polaris, which works to combat and prevent human trafficking and modern-day slavery and runs the National Human Trafficking Hotline, led a "survivor survey" revolving around their experiences with systems and industries. Polaris received responses from 127 survivors, 64% of whom reported being homeless or experiencing unstable housing at the point in their life when they were coerced into trafficking. While this survey included victims who entered into a trafficking situation past the age of 48, over half of the survivors reported that they had been forced into trafficking before the age of twenty-three.

The largest-ever research studies conducted to look at homelessness in youth fell under the auspices of Covenant House International, the largest privately funded agency in the Americas dedicated to providing a range of care to homeless children between the ages of 14 and 20. Nearly 1,000 homeless youth between the ages of 17 and 25 were sampled across 13 cities throughout the United States and Canada. Between the two studies that comprised Covenant House's initiative, close to one-fifth of those interviewed reported being trafficking victims.

⁴ Farley, Melissa. *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress*. Psychology Press, 2003.

⁵ United States Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2013), <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt>

Fifteen percent reported they were trafficked for sex (this includes youth who were not necessarily coerced but were minors), 7.4% reported that they engaged in labor trafficking, and 3% reported being victim to both.

One of the two studies conducted by the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research for Covenant House consisted of interviews with 270 homeless youth across three cities. The Field Center discovered that 95% of those they interviewed who were sex trafficked had a history of childhood maltreatment. Their interviews also revealed that 41% of the youth who were sex trafficked had at least one out-of-home placement at some point in their lives. Many of them experienced moving frequently during their childhood. In contrast, the youth who reported having supportive adults present in their lives were less likely to be sex trafficked than their unsupported counterparts.

Dr. Laura T. Murphy of the Modern Slavery Research Project, which is the other research partner involved in Covenant House's initiative, said they found through their study that "youth were seeking what we all seek—shelter, work, security—and that traffickers preyed on those very needs." Independent from Covenant House's efforts, the National Human Trafficking Hotline cites the lack of a strong supportive network as a notable cause that leads runaway and homeless youths to enter unfamiliar environments that put them especially at risk of trafficking. Traffickers target these youth at shelters, transportation hubs, and other public spaces, often feigning affection and manipulation to draw in their victims to elicit commercial sex or services. These predators give their victims the false impression of becoming their significant other and play to the youths' need for love and social acceptance to the point where the victim becomes completely reliable on the trafficker for basic survival necessities.

The common theme throughout these cases is the lack of a strong support network—the failure to provide a young person with the stability and structure that supports healthy childhood development and resiliency.

Relationship to Opioid Crisis

Sadly, the rising opioid epidemic in the U.S. is exacerbating the risk of human trafficking, but not in an expected way. Some victims do find themselves addicted to opioids and other drugs, which are used by their traffickers to exploit and control them. Yet a growing concern, as identified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), is that the number of children in foster care nationally between 2012 and 2016 increased by more than 10% after a decade of significant decline, and they reported that "there is a broad agreement that the ongoing opioid epidemic has been a primary contributor to those increases." With parents addicted to opioids and struggling to take care of their children, these youth often end up in the overwhelmed and underfunded foster care system.

Even more heartbreaking than a parent's opioid abuse separating a child from their guardian is the increase in "familial sex trafficking," in which parents and other family members trade sex with a child in their family for opioids or money to buy drugs. It is estimated that this atrocity is occurring throughout the United States, yet Massachusetts and West Virginia are two notable states where family members prostituting their children out is known to be a big issue, despite likely being "severely underreported," according to Brian Morris, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Special Agent and co-chair of the West Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force.

Although studies have not yet been conducted to provide empirical evidence of the correlation between the opiate/opioid crisis, foster care, and human trafficking, it is clear that there is a complex relationship here that requires further research and attention, and one that practitioners have reported is at near crisis levels.

Human Trafficking and Major Sporting Events

Media reporting suggests that during sporting events there is a rise in trafficking of persons, but this is often disputed. There have been no solid studies to determine whether or not it is the increased police operations, driven by media attention, that result in additional rescues and arrests; or if there are actually more incidents of trafficking surrounding these events⁶. The reporting has, however, resulted in the awareness of human trafficking surrounding these events to be on the rise, and rightly so. Professionals such as the Victim Assistance Specialists from the Department of Homeland Security have taken to the streets of cities hosting such events to take advantage of the temporary influx of people in an effort to educate the masses. During February's Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta, Georgia, Victim Assistance Specialists approached Super Bowl attendees and passersby to explain common indicators of human trafficking. Printed information and conversations with these specialists were, for some members of the public, the first they had heard of this term and the issue. This kind of educational outreach at large group events clearly help the community more cognizant of the warning signs of human trafficking.

This crime undoubtedly occurs around large-scale public occasions. Earlier this year, for example, law enforcement and nonprofit organizations partnered to uncover human trafficking ahead of the NBA All-Star Game in Charlotte, North Carolina. After engaging with more than 20 potential victims and gathering intelligence on likely trafficking offenders, they learned about the specific situation of five at-risk individuals, and paired several of the victims with victim service representatives who specialize in assisting these people with rebuilding their lives.

Yet major events are not necessarily conducive to an increase in human trafficking in the host city. Studies into this possible issue have not revealed a strong link that the amount of forced sex

⁶ "Debunking the Myth of 'Super Bowl Sex Trafficking': Media Hype or Evidence-based coverage". Anti-Trafficking Review. <https://www.antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal/article/view/404/336>

labor specifically increases despite the temporary rise in online solicitation for commercial sex in the area that the FBI traditionally sees during large-scale gatherings. One study, conducted by the University of Minnesota's Urban Research Outreach-Engagement Center, identified that the first documented concerns of major sporting events that caused an increase in sex trafficking sprouted from anticipation of the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece, and that although such concerns did not actualize in the end, the response "set the template" for how sex trafficking was dealt with for subsequent sporting events.

Prevention

However, the attention brought to the issue by these large-scale events is an opportunity not to be missed. One of the primary vulnerabilities identified by practitioners and academics is the lack of education and awareness surrounding the issue. These sporting events, and other major events, offer a unique opportunity to capture the public's attention and inject a much-needed level of awareness, and ultimately acceptance, that human trafficking is a reality here in the United States. These efforts can positively impact the prevention of human trafficking.

Even though it is one of the "3 P's," prevention has often been overshadowed by protection and prosecution. Unfortunately, focusing solely on protection and prosecution assumes that a person has already been victimized. While the focus on victim services is essential and should not be minimized, equal attention should be placed on prevention. The effects of human trafficking are life-altering, and victims bear the physical, emotional, and psychological scars for the rest of their lives. The amount of resources required to support a victim of human trafficking is estimated to be equivalent to that of 10 domestic violence survivors according to the Department of Homeland Security. The needs of a human trafficking survivor can overwhelm systems put in place to support them.

If the effects are so grave and we know many of the societal determinants that lead to people being trafficked, the most important question before the government should be: how do we prevent human trafficking from happening in the first place?

The 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report, published by the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, carefully examines the efforts that have been made by countries to fight trafficking and evaluates where improvement is still needed. Among the many recommendations for the United States is a call to "Increase prevention efforts...through outreach to and intervention services for marginalized communities." (State Dept 2019).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office on Trafficking in Persons recommends examining prevention efforts through two models—the Three Levels of Prevention Model, which looks at efforts that can be made during different stages of the trafficking process through the Socio-Ecological Model, which outlines

the different factors that may contribute to a victim being trafficked. Understanding these models can improve our nation's efforts to prevent human trafficking by drawing attention to the various needs of a victim or potential victim in a trafficking scenario.

Primary Prevention

The Three Levels of Prevention model divides prevention work into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Primary prevention stops trafficking before it ever occurs. Traffickers are master manipulators, preying on victims who are vulnerable emotionally, financially, or socially. The goal of engaging in primary prevention techniques is to reduce the vulnerability of potential victims through empowering the vulnerable and strengthening the social and community ties that can serve as an additional protective barrier. Spreading awareness about trafficking, online safety, and healthy relationships is a vital part of this type of prevention work.

Primary Prevention is the central focus of the Just Ask Trafficking Prevention Foundation. The mission is to inoculate individuals, especially youth, against trafficking through our various programs, establishing safeguards to decrease vulnerabilities and suggestibility factors. We have multiple programs that work directly with young people, including an educational curriculum, a Student Advisory Council that mobilizes students to participate in anti-trafficking efforts, and an annual conference that is geared toward high school and college students, as well as their parents and community members. We also make a point to engage the community and their leaders. It is important for state and local government leaders to feel empowered to address these issues in their community, and not be dissuaded by misguided fears that it will negatively reflect upon the reputation of the jurisdiction they serve. We have seen first-hand that these prevention efforts have resulted in protecting potential victims from trafficking situations—preventing the victimization before it ever occurred.

Informed curriculum is a powerful primary prevention tool that has been proven to change youth's awareness of trafficking. Imagine the impact of a program that was supported on a national level, or at least where the resources were made available so that the curriculum could be implemented in every school across the country. At the end of the day, we can't always be next to the children we care about to help them make wise decisions. A student curriculum like Just Ask's TRAP (Trafficking Resistance, Awareness, and Prevention) program is a powerful tool we can equip students with so they can protect themselves from potential dangers. Many organizations are recognizing the need for this type of curricula to be put in place to educate students about the dangers of human trafficking. In a report about Human Trafficking in America's Schools, the U.S. Department of Education recommended "develop[ing] a comprehensive prevention awareness program targeted at students...alerting them to the nature and danger of child trafficking" (U.S. Department of Education). In addition, Polaris suggests that fostering a safe and supportive school through student education is one of the key elements

in building a response to trafficking in schools (NHTRC). The principle barrier is adequate funding.

In our own work with implementing preventative curricula in numerous school districts worldwide, we have seen that teaching young people directly about trafficking results in an increase in reporting. Teachers have reported that their students are incredibly receptive to the information in the lessons. Once students begin to see what grooming behavior or trafficking situations look like, some have come forward with reports of such abuse. Because trafficking situations often do not look like they do in the movies, it can be hard for students to imagine that grooming or trafficking can be happening to them. The stories and scenarios make it easier for students to see problematic behaviors that may be happening at home or online.

Engaging teens through anti-trafficking clubs and opportunities like our Student Advisory Council and youth conferences adds greater depth to primary preventative efforts. Evidence suggests that engaging the population affected by an issue, in this case youth, who are especially vulnerable to trafficking, can be valuable and more likely to be effective (Institute of Medicine). By inviting teens into the conversations we're having in the anti-trafficking community, we gain a priceless resource—teen perspectives and ingenuity. As participants learn more about trafficking, they are able to teach their peers and encourage each other to have healthy relationships and online practices.

In addition, we have seen a lot of success in primary prevention efforts through community engagement and conversations. We have hosted and participated in events in nearly every social sector. Parent sessions are some of the most powerful conversations we conduct. Teaching parents about what grooming looks like and how they can reduce the vulnerability of their teens by developing open lines of communication is key to protecting the youth in our community. Traffickers look for those who feel cut off from their families and don't have anyone else to whom they can turn. Parents and family members are the single most important connection that can be nurtured, if possible, to reduce the risk of trafficking. In a similar manner, community members can serve as a support network to vulnerable people who are at risk of being trafficked. The more communities know about human trafficking and how it happens, the more we as a society will be able to build connections that can protect. These connections can be in the form of one-on-one relationships, like the relationship between an at-risk child and their trained school counselor or devoting more resources to organizations that provide a safe place for vulnerable members of society, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, LGBTQ+ support groups, and afterschool programs. As Just Ask Prevention has participated in community education, valuable community links have been formed with educators, bank owners, law enforcement officers, business owners, and many more. The more people participate in these conversations, the more threads are added to the social safety net for vulnerable members of our country.

Secondary Prevention

Secondary prevention is an immediate response to trafficking after it has occurred. It involves first responses, such as basic services, including emergency and medical care that address short-term consequences. These efforts remove victims from potential danger and provide them with resources they need to temporarily escape their trafficking situation. A major portion of secondary prevention work is training professionals and community members to identify possible trafficking red flags and report them to the authorities. Then law enforcement officers and medical professionals who interact with victims must be trained to understand trafficking and how to respond in a trauma-informed way.

Nearly every profession can benefit from training to recognize signs of trafficking. There are different markers to consider in different settings, so profession-specific training is best. Businesses that deal with travel and hospitality can be useful in detecting victims that are traveling or being moved through their locations. Currently, U.S. legislation that addresses trafficking in the hospitality industry is beginning to pass. According to a survey conducted by ECPAT, an anti-trafficking organization:

“In recent years an increasing number of states have passed laws requiring lodging facilities to display signage calling attention to the problem of human trafficking and alerting the public to the indications of trafficking, the hotline number to report suspicious activity and services for victims...Similarly, a number of states have enacted legislation requiring lodging facilities to arrange for their employees to be trained to recognize signs of human trafficking and what actions to take in the event that such signs are observed. Other states do not mandate the training, but have made it available on a public agency website. Additional states are currently considering similar legislation. Thus, it is safe to predict that the number of states mandating such training will continue to grow” (Weiss).

Similarly, many airlines are training their employees to recognize and report potential human trafficking victims, and airports are posting more trafficking notices, similar to the ones required in some hotels, in their facilities. Teachers, counselors, and other educational professionals have the power to participate in both primary prevention through curriculum work with youth, and secondary prevention by picking up on clues that students in their classrooms could be victims of trafficking. Teachers interact with their students every day and can observe troubling changes in their behavior. Bank employees can train to recognize suspicious transactions that could point to potential trafficking situations. Nearly every profession can implement training so that their employees can observe community members with a watchful eye.

Law enforcement officers are usually the first to interact with the victim after they have been removed from a trafficking situation. They carry an enormous burden to respond to the crimes

that they witness while acting in a way that helps the victim feel safe. The United States has long recognized the need for human trafficking training for law enforcement professionals. The December 2017 Report on U.S. Government Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons, written by the President's Interagency Task Force, details steps they believe must be taken to eradicate trafficking. The report's strategic objective three states that the United States must "enhance training of stakeholders, including civil society, law enforcement, and government officials, to increase identification of victims" (PITF). While the Federal Government has recommended improved training of law enforcement, they have not put a method in place or allocated the resources to accomplish their recommendation nor have standards been set.

Without proper assistance and training, it would be hard for a police department to know exactly how to address a crime that they many have heard little or nothing about. A 2015 study called "Police Perceptions of Human Trafficking," by Amy Farrell and Rebecca Pfeiffer, surveyed police officers to see how they treated human trafficking in their departments. They found that many participants were confused how this "new crime" was different than others, mostly because they were now working on human trafficking cases without trafficking-specific training. The police officers in the study detailed ways they used other crimes with well-established responses to inform their responses to human trafficking. This means that without proper training, many investigators handle human trafficking the way they handle prostitution or other vice cases (Farrell 2015). As human trafficking victims are in their lifestyle as the result of force, fraud, or coercion, treating them as criminals can retraumatize them and make them less likely to see the police officer as someone who can help them escape their situation. In fact, in a 2001 study of sexual assault victims, almost half of the women felt that the police weren't helpful, and a significant amount felt that they were met with victim blaming or controlling responses (Ullman). With training, law enforcement can be given the tools and framework needed to address human trafficking cases in a way that leads to the healthiest outcome for victims and the greatest success in the prosecution of the trafficking crimes.

Learning about human trafficking can also serve to banish misconceptions about the prevalence of the crime and increase the amount of human trafficking cases that are prosecuted. According to a 2008 national law enforcement survey, local law enforcement believed that human trafficking was a rare or non-existent crime in their communities, when in fact cases are found in essentially every community in the United States. The study also demonstrated that the degree to which law enforcement is prepared to identify human trafficking cases is a significant indicator to whether or not they actually investigate any (Farrell 2008). To address the horrific crime that has infiltrated our communities, law enforcement agencies need to take the necessary steps to prepare and train themselves.

Members of the medical community can doubly participate in secondary prevention work. First, they can be trained to recognize the physical and psychological indicators of a possible

trafficking situation, such as a patient who will not disclose how they were injured, has another person communicating all their medical information for them, and comes in repeatedly for injuries that would be conducive to sexual or physical abuse tied to trafficking. Medical professionals may be among the few people that victims are able to interact with outside of their situation. According to a 2014 survey of survivors of sex trafficking, 87.8% reported that they had contact with healthcare professionals while they were being trafficked. For this reason, doctors and nurses have an enormous opportunity to detect trafficking. When hospitals and clinics have a predetermined reporting plan, it empowers the staff to act when they have suspicions. Second, conducting trauma-informed trainings for medical professionals, similar to the ones that are conducted with law enforcement officers, can improve the experience of victims who are just leaving their trafficking situation. Many survivors who see a doctor, especially one who has just left or been removed from their circumstances, may have experienced physical, mental, and emotional trauma, and an insensitive doctor could be extremely triggering to them.

As members of Just Ask Prevention Project have traveled around the country administering these professional trainings to members of various organizations, we have seen the way that this information has changed the way employees and community members approach the topic of trafficking. Instead of thinking that trafficking is only something that happens far out of sight, they see it as something that could happen in their own workspace, right under their nose. More than just dispensing information, we empower our trainees to do what they can in their line of work to protect victims.

Tertiary Prevention

Tertiary prevention deals with developing long-term responses in the aftermath of trafficking. The services involved in this type of prevention work, such as long-term housing, job training and therapeutic counseling, have the end goal of preventing revictimization and making it easier for survivors to navigate the lasting effects of being exploited.

Deterrence is Prevention

The “3 P’s” are interconnected—one is dependent on the other. Prevention and prosecution are linked and augment the ultimate goal. Prevention efforts as outlined above bring more awareness to the community, encourage victims to self-report, and ultimately increase the number of prosecutions. Likewise, effective prosecution of offenders leads to prevention through deterrence. When the penalties for persons engaged in the trafficking (both buying and selling) become so great that it makes this type of criminal behavior “too risky,” it will decrease the prevalence of the issue all together. To accomplish this, law enforcement must be equipped with the proper tools and resources necessary to identify and respond to suspected instances of human trafficking. Many efforts are underway to make training and technical assistance services available to frontline officers and investigators since the number of law enforcement professionals that have been properly trained is disturbingly low. Additionally, human trafficking

investigations require more resources than almost every other type of crime. Many of these investigative techniques are new and innovative. Law enforcement and prosecutors need to be supported with the proper tools to be able to effectively and efficiently address this problem.

Prevention through education should be the primary goal of the collaborative efforts to combat trafficking, but that does not completely eradicate trafficking and therefore intervention becomes a necessity. Intervention, as previously discussed, presents two unique categories of problems. The first challenge is the prosecution of cases. In addition to the complexities involved in addressing victims' needs and securing their testimony and cooperation for prosecution, there is the sweeping volume of evidence to compile. Some companies operating within the United States delay responses to subpoenas or search warrants hindering law enforcement's ability to react swiftly to recover people being exploited. Once the offenders are arrested and charged, there exists the frustration of punitive sentences consistently falling below Federal Sentencing Guidelines. When defendants are recommended stiff penalties for their predatory and life-altering conduct, judges are imposing sentences well below those recommendations. There is also the challenge in proving force, fraud, or coercion in instances where the victims are 18 years of age or older. In these cases, traffickers refrain from physical force to avoid prosecution and use other forms of mental manipulation that are difficult to prove statutorily. The Mann Act (18 U.S.C. 2421-2423) criminalizes transportation of persons across state lines for the purposes of prostitution; however, the Act currently has no provisions for mandatory minimums when the victims are adults. This does not accurately reflect the level of victimization placed on those exploited by the traffickers.

Another area of concern that is often not addressed is the demand for commercial sex that fuels the traffickers' criminal enterprises. Individual states are enacting legislation to increase penalties for those that are paying for commercial sex, but state and local governments need support. By deterring those who are purchasing sex through stiff federal penalties would equally deter the instances of sex trafficking in the United States.

Conclusion

By providing the necessary resources to allow law enforcement in collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, a collaborative approach will better educate, prevent, and intervene in trafficking scenarios in an effort to deter traffickers, reduce the number of victims, and restore the lives of those exploited. These resources include stiffer penalties for criminal behavior indicative of trafficking conduct, training for service providers to institute effective practices of treatment, and awareness and training through a national campaign to unveil the reality of trafficking in the diverse communities throughout the United States, where traffickers prey on the young and vulnerable regardless of their background. I have witnessed first-hand the negative impact that trafficking has on the life of a young person—according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the average life expectancy of a trafficking victim is only seven

(7) years after the exploitation begins. However, I have also witnessed first-hand the restoration of a person and their basic human rights and dignity through proper response, treatment, and justice through meaningful prosecutions. I have witnessed first-hand that there is hope.