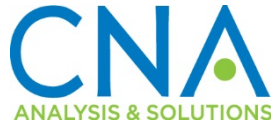


CNA Vulnerable Populations: Local Communities' Strategies and Best Practices to Address the Problem of Child Trafficking in the U.S.

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October 2017

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Monica Giovachino'.

Monica Giovachino
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Abstract

Child trafficking is a pervasive criminal justice and public health concern in the United States. Over the past 17 years, law enforcement agencies have made great strides in understanding child trafficking networks, investigating child trafficking cases, bringing traffickers to justice, and restoring freedom to children trafficked for sex and labor. Law enforcement agencies are frequently the first contacts for child victims of trafficking and serve as community leaders for local anti-trafficking initiatives. While law enforcement agencies have grown in their capacity to identify and respond to child trafficking situations, key challenges persist in victim identification, victim engagement and support, and investigation protocols.

This document provides a broad overview of the challenges facing law enforcement agencies and how interdisciplinary partnerships are being used across the country to overcome these barriers and ensure a comprehensive approach to curbing child sex and labor trafficking.

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Glossary

ACTeam	Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team
ASPE	Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
CSEC	Commercial sexual exploitation of children
CSE-IT	Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool
DCFS	Department of Children and Family Services
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DJJ	Department of Juvenile Justice
DOJ	Department of Justice
HHS	Health and Human Services
IACP	International Association for Chiefs of Police
JVTA	Justice for Victims of Trafficking
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
NCSL	National Conference of State Legislatures
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OTIP	Office for Trafficking in Persons
OVC	Office for Victims of Crime, DOJ
OVCTTAC	Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center
SEEN	Support to End Exploitation Now
TTA	Training and technical assistance
TVIT	Trafficking Victims Identification Tool
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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Introduction

Child trafficking is a serious criminal justice and public health issue facing communities today. Child trafficking has an indelible effect on victims and survivors, their families and loved ones, and communities at large. To combat child trafficking, communities across the United States have fostered collaborative partnerships to implement innovative strategies for identifying and assisting trafficked children and bringing traffickers to justice.

What is child trafficking?

Under federal law, child labor trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.”¹ A person under the age of 18 induced to perform a commercial sex act is a victim of child sex trafficking, regardless of the use of force, fraud, or coercion.² Child sex trafficking is sometimes discussed under the broader umbrella term *commercial sexual exploitation of children* (CSEC), which involves a broader range of commercial sexual abuse crimes, such as child pornography and child sex tourism.³

Children have been trafficked in agricultural labor settings, through the commercial sex industry, and in traveling sales crews, among other settings. Children who are already facing adversity or have been marginalized in society, such as runaway youth or children in foster care, are at particular risk for trafficking.⁴ The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that one in six runaways reported to their hotline were likely sex trafficking victims,⁵ and one in five runaways served by Covenant House, a national network of runaway youth providers, were identified as labor or sex trafficking victims.⁶

What is being done about child trafficking?

Since the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000, law enforcement agencies across the country have made significant advances in identifying child trafficking situations, bringing traffickers to justice, and emancipating child trafficking victims.⁷ Agencies have trained their workforce and

developed specialized response protocols and policies regarding child trafficking and exploitation. Federal, state, and local governments have allocated resources and funding, enhanced intelligence-based policing to improve data and law enforcement interventions, and successfully investigated child sex and labor cases. Law enforcement agencies have gained greater insights into the networks and operational models that allow trafficking to go undetected and have participated in large-scale community education and youth prevention initiatives.

What challenges still exist in combatting child trafficking?

Seventeen years after the passage of the TVPA, significant challenges persist for law enforcement agencies. Many trafficking operations have proven to be nimble, adapting to an increasingly global, interconnected, and technology-driven society. Recruitment and advertisement move online, trafficking operations cross state lines and national borders, and traffickers continually hone their methods of control and coercion.

Child trafficking cases are complex. Trafficking frequently coincides with other criminal behavior (e.g., domestic violence, drug trafficking, money laundering),⁸ and it is imperative that law enforcement recognize the undercurrents of exploitation. Sex and labor trafficking cases often involve victims who may not self-identify as victims of trafficking, but who have extensive stabilization and recovery needs.

Law enforcement agencies must adopt a comprehensive approach to deterrence and prevention. Effective response to child trafficking cases may require redefinition of success. It is not enough to simply prosecute traffickers; law enforcement must also seek to restore freedom to victims. Law enforcement cannot accomplish this alone. Curbing child trafficking and providing adequate support to survivors require community-wide participation and collaboration.

To identify effective strategies to combat child trafficking, CNA reviewed the body of literature on law enforcement responses to domestic child trafficking. Three key challenges for law enforcement emerged:

1. Identifying child trafficking victims;
2. Engaging child trafficking victims; and
3. Building successful child sex and labor cases.

In August 2017, CNA hosted a panel discussion on child trafficking with leaders from Virginia's Fairfax and Loudoun counties.⁹ The panelists discussed their communities' collaborative anti-trafficking efforts, strategies to overcome common

challenges in combatting child trafficking, and recommendations for other communities looking to strengthen their responses to child trafficking. Panelists included:

- Elizabeth Payne, K-12 Coordinator for Health, Family Life, and Physical Education for Fairfax County Public Schools;
- Caroline Diemar, Polaris National Hotlines Director;
- Supervisory Special Agent Robert Bornstein, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Child Exploitation & Human Trafficking Task Force;
- Lieutenant Jaime Sanford, Criminal Investigations Section for Leesburg Police Department;
- Deepa Patel, Executive Director of Trauma and Hope, LLC; and
- Heather Peck Dziewulski, Child Services Administrator for Loudoun County Department of Family Services.

This document brings together research and expert recommendations to provide a broad overview of the challenges facing law enforcement agencies responding to child trafficking and to identify promising practices that agencies are using to leverage interdisciplinary partnerships to overcome these barriers.

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Victim Identification

A robust community response to child trafficking first requires prompt and accurate identification of victims and those at risk. Research reveals that victim identification is a challenge for the anti-trafficking community. While exact statistics are not known, current data suggest that victims of trafficking are significantly under-identified.¹⁰

Law enforcement officers play a crucial role in victim identification, as they are frequently the first to have contact with possible victims.¹¹ It is essential that law enforcement and other first responders (e.g., medical providers) and child-serving professionals (e.g., social workers, educators) recognize the indicators of child sex and labor trafficking.

Identification is at the heart of how we are going to be able to assist survivors. It is important we train all frontline personnel; trafficking victims have had many touchpoints to professionals who might have identified them if they had known what to look for.
— Caroline Diemar, Polaris

Challenges

Lack of awareness

Law enforcement agencies rely on partner organizations and the broader community for information about human trafficking situations. When first responders and community members do not know what human trafficking is, and when victims do not know how to get assistance, trafficking crimes will likely go undetected.¹²

The illicit activities that encompass human trafficking are often hidden and hard to detect. Traffickers make a concerted effort to make victims dependent on them, hiding the crime by hiding the victim and restricting the victim's interaction with the outside world.¹³ This dynamic makes it challenging for community members to report potential instances of human trafficking. Some argue, however, that even if victims were more visible, the anti-trafficking community might not recognize an individual as a victim because of a lack of awareness and poor understanding of the problem.

Public opinion of trafficking victimization continues to suffer from confusion, denial that it occurs in the U.S., and the belief that victims are complicit in their trafficking. According to a recent study, 90 percent of the public understands that human trafficking is a form of slavery, but misconceptions about trafficking abound (e.g., beliefs that most victims are female, that most are immigrants, and that trafficking has to involve transporting the victim across a border). While the public is concerned about the crime of human trafficking, people are less likely to believe that it occurs in their community.¹⁴ These perceptions and stereotypes may also prevent anti-trafficking professionals from identifying victims.¹⁵

Victims of child trafficking come from a wide range of backgrounds. Law enforcement should keep in mind that child trafficking victims may be either gender, and any nationality, or socioeconomic status. While current statistics indicate that child sex trafficking is more frequently reported than child labor trafficking, this may be a result of uneven community awareness. Further, research indicates that boys and girls may be sexually exploited at similar rates, even though people are more aware of the sex trafficking of girls.¹⁶

Failure to self-identify

Trafficking victims rarely report their situation to law enforcement. This is often due to fear, but also because they may not see themselves as victims.¹⁷ According to one study, 75 percent of trafficked youth do not recognize their own exploitation.¹⁸ Child victims tend to be strongly influenced by their trafficker, who may use false promises of love and protection, threats and coercion, or debt bondage to create dependence. Not only are child victims unlikely to see themselves as victims, they also may not perceive their trafficker as a criminal and therefore will not contact authorities. Other barriers that may prevent victims from reporting include threats against family members, distrust of authority, language and social barriers, loyalty or traumatic attachment to traffickers, normalization of abuse, misinformation about their rights, captivity and confinement, or traffickers' monitoring of their movement and communication.¹⁹

Classification and eligibility constraints

Service providers dedicated to assisting children are frequently law enforcement's leading source of tips or referrals.²⁰ Communities across the United States report that trafficked children are likely to already be known to child welfare systems.²¹ Since the implementation of the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) and the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act,²² state child welfare agencies have tried to educate child abuse hotline workers and child protection staff on the indicators of child trafficking. They have also made progress in developing processes to support victim identification and improving service provision.

Nevertheless, gaps remain in service providers' ability to intercede in trafficking situations where the primary trafficker does not meet the state's definition of a guardian or caretaker, as is the case when children are trafficked by strangers or intimate partners.²³ This gap may result in the return of trafficked children to homes where they are accessible to their trafficker or are at continued risk of exploitation.

Law enforcement agencies face more specific identification challenges because of the nature of their interactions with possible victims of trafficking. Law enforcement officials continue to misclassify victims as criminals.²⁴ Federal trafficking laws clearly consider children who have been induced to provide a commercial sex act victims of trafficking, but state laws differ in their definitions of child sex trafficking. Despite continued education on the nature of the crime and methods of control employed by traffickers, officers often fail to see the coercion and

exploitation behind juvenile involvement in commercial sex.²⁵ Victims are detained and sometimes deported based on the assumption that they are engaging in illegal activities of their own accord, rather than being identified as victims and diverted to social services.²⁶ This increases their risk of future victimization and denies them access to the services they need.²⁷ In one study, federal, state, and local law enforcement officials, as well as prosecutors, reported having trouble distinguishing human trafficking crimes from prostitution or human smuggling.²⁸ Distinguishing victims from criminals and human trafficking from other crimes is critical to successfully removing a child from exploitation.



State Safe Harbor Statutes

[Safe Harbor: State Efforts to Combat Child Trafficking](#), National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

This brief by NCSL describes six key themes in state Safe Harbor laws and discusses policy options for each. The brief covers the coordination of state resources, funds for anti-trafficking efforts, provision of services for trafficked children, decriminalization and diversion options for trafficked children, penalties for child traffickers, and legislative requirements for training of professionals who may come into contact with trafficked children. NCSL also tracks the enactment of state Safe Harbor laws on their website.

[JuST Response Council Protective Response Model](#), Shared Hope International

This resource compares state Safe Harbor models based on their attributes: immunity without referral, immunity with referral, law enforcement referral to protective system response, and diversion process.

[Steps to Safety: Guide to Drafting Safe Harbor Legislation to Protect Sex-Trafficked Children](#), ECPAT-USA

ECPAT-USA provides a summary of the key components to incorporate into state Safe Harbor laws, a checklist for drafting Safe Harbor laws, a summary of existing state Safe Harbor laws by provision, and an analysis of existing statutes by state.

Promising practices

Researchers and experts have developed a number of promising practices that address some of the challenges discussed above. Training and education are crucial for accurate identification of victims. To intervene appropriately, law enforcement and supportive services must understand the prevalence and nature of child trafficking in their community. Standardized and universal policies and protocols can help communities improve collaboration between all levels of law enforcement.

Professional training

Every anti-trafficking organization, including law enforcement, should emphasize continuing education to ensure a common, coordinated approach. For example, rather than relying solely on vice units, law enforcement should train narcotics, major cases, patrol, and victim assistance teams to recognize the indicators of human trafficking. Better-trained units can identify trafficking cases that might otherwise go unnoticed.²⁹ More specifically, research recommends that every frontline officer know the physical and behavioral indicators of trafficking.³⁰ Co-trainings establish and solidify partnerships between law enforcement and local service providers.

Outreach and awareness

Communities should develop partnerships to organize outreach at multiple levels. Community-wide awareness campaigns can mobilize the community to support anti-trafficking programs and correct misconceptions about child trafficking. Outreach to potential trafficking victims should be tailored to its audience.³¹ Youth access information in vastly different ways than adults; child trafficking outreach efforts should leverage social media and other dissemination mechanisms used by youth. Outreach efforts are more effective when they employ empowering messages delivered by relatable and trustworthy messengers.



Outreach and Awareness Materials



[Faces of Human Trafficking](#), Office for Victims of Crime (OVC)

OVC has developed a series of free awareness materials for educating law enforcement, service providers, and community members about human trafficking, with a focus on the experience of trafficking victims. These include videos, discussion guides, fact sheets, and customizable posters. All Faces of Human Trafficking materials are available in English and Spanish.



[Look Beneath the Surface](#), Office of Trafficking in Persons (OTIP), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

The Look Beneath the Surface campaign challenges service providers and other stakeholders to understand the indicators of human trafficking. Free materials include a video, posters, brochures for health and social service providers, and wallet-sized indicator cards with contact information for the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Campaign materials are available in multiple languages.



[Blue Campaign](#), Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

The Blue Campaign raises community awareness about human trafficking and offers training to law enforcement agencies to increase identification and investigation of suspected human trafficking cases. The Blue Campaign's website hosts law enforcement training videos, toolkits for first responders, posters, infographic, fact sheets, and wallet-sized first responder cards.



[H.E.A.T. Watch Protect Oakland Kids Billboard Campaign](#), Alameda County District Attorney's Office

H.E.A.T. Watch has developed an online five-point strategy toolkit on combatting human trafficking. One component of H.E.A.T. Watch's strategy is effective, targeted outreach. The Protect Oakland Kids Billboard Campaign has been praised as a premier example of empowering and relatable outreach messaging. The campaign was informed by survivors of trafficking and an increase in the number of calls to the local anti-trafficking hotline.

Standardization of screening protocols

As information about child trafficking and available services saturates a community, frontline professionals should employ standardized tools to screen youth for sex and labor trafficking. Communities should evaluate the screening protocols in use by partner agencies. If they are redundant, they should be streamlined to reduce the risk of re-traumatizing victims by requiring them to repeatedly disclose their trafficking experience. Policies and protocols should include the following:

1. Standard screening and interview procedures to ensure consistent identification and treatment of victims³²
2. Comprehensive response protocol that dictates the steps individuals should take if they come into contact with a possible trafficking victim³³

Policies and protocols should also outline the importance of how one engages a possible victim. All policies must be victim centered and trauma informed and take into account the following:

1. Recognize that factors which make juvenile victims vulnerable to trafficking may mirror risk factors for juvenile justice system involvement.³⁴
2. Recognize the history of violence and trauma and the complex psychological and physical factors that might be present.³⁵

Communities can improve the systematic identification of victims by creating cross-system screening tools to help identify victims within public systems.³⁶ Three examples of communities that have formalized community-wide screening and referral protocols follow:

1. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) developed the Human Trafficking Screening Tool to identify child victims of labor trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. This tool was developed by law enforcement officials, community partners, and service providers in coordination with the



Screening Tools

[Human Trafficking Screening Tool for Runaway and Homeless Youth and Youth in Child Welfare](#), Urban Institute, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and the Migration Policy Institute

The Human Trafficking Screening Tool (HTST) was developed and pre-tested with youth (ages 12-24) involved in the runaway and homeless youth and child welfare systems across four states. The tool can be administered online by a practitioner or by the youth. A short and long form were developed and validated for the HTST and covers both sex and labor trafficking indicators.

[Trafficking Victim Identification Tool \(TVIT\)](#), Vera Institute of Justice

The TVIT is the first validated screening tool on human trafficking for service providers and law enforcement. The tool spans 30 topics related to sex and labor trafficking and can be used with children or adults. The TVIT is available in short or long form and has been validated in English and Spanish. The TVIT user guidelines provide useful recommendations for service providers and law enforcement on how to effectively engage a potential human trafficking survivor and how to avoid re-traumatization during the course of the screening.

[Commercial Sexual Exploitation – Identification Tool \(CSE-IT\)](#), WestCoast Children’s Clinic

The WestCoast Children’s Clinic recognized that trafficked youth are not often identified by service providers, law enforcement, or other youth-serving professionals until long after the exploitation has begun. WestCoast developed and validated the CSE-IT to address the unique needs and experiences of youth who have been sexually exploited. The CSE-IT examines eight key domains of life (e.g., housing, relationships, coercion) to determine whether the youth has experienced clear indicators of CSEC.

DJJ and the Florida Department of Children and Families. The risk assessment tool is used to assess at-risk youth across child-serving state agencies in an effort to reduce duplicative and re-traumatizing screenings and self-disclosures.³⁷

2. Law enforcement agencies in San Diego County, CA, partnered with child welfare organizations, school district personnel, probation officers, and non-profit service providers in Grossmont Union High School District to better understand at-risk youth within their school district. The school district director of guidance and wellness developed protocol for teachers and administrators to identify youth who might be involved in human trafficking.³⁸
3. WestCoast Children's Clinic developed the CSE-IT for child welfare agencies, juvenile probation agencies, mental and primary health clinics, dependency law firms, schools, and homeless youth shelters to identify possible child victims of human trafficking.³⁹ It is currently in use by 22 California counties. Over 8,000 children have been screened using the tool and 2,000 professionals have been trained on it.⁴⁰ Preliminary data found that 19 percent of children screened resulted in a "clear concern" of commercial sexual exploitation and 24 percent resulted in a "possible concern."⁴¹ Implementation of standardized, validated screening tools led to earlier identification and to improved access to supportive services.⁴²

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Working with Child Victims

Once a possible child trafficking victim is identified, it is important for law enforcement officers to use a trauma-informed approach to engage with that child. Trauma-informed approaches realize the impact that trauma can have on behavior, recognize signs of trauma, and respond in a manner that avoids re-traumatization.⁴³ Law enforcement officers report that working with child trafficking victims can be difficult.⁴⁴ These young people may be reluctant to cooperate with investigations and may not recognize that a crime has been committed against them. They often assert their own agency as a willing participant, and are otherwise resistant to accept help or advice from authority figures. Law enforcement officers are more successful at engaging victims when they recognize that these beliefs and behaviors may actually be a sign of resiliency and survival techniques gained from challenging or traumatic circumstances.

Challenges

Impact of trauma

Practitioners and researchers have found that child trafficking victims are likely to have experienced trauma prior to and as result of their trafficking experience.⁴⁵ Traffickers frequently target at-risk youth and are adept at identifying youth who are under financial stress, who have run away from home and lack strong support networks, who have experienced prior abuse or neglect, and who struggle with low self-esteem or mental health issues.⁴⁶ Traffickers use the child's vulnerabilities to build a rapport with them by demonstrating care and initially providing for the youth's needs. Over time, this bond is reinforced through a replication of family or intimate partner relationships and becomes a method of control.⁴⁷ Children who experience trauma bonding may express feelings of love and commitment to their trafficker and be reluctant to report any abuse or exploitation, if they are even able to identify their treatment as such.⁴⁸ It may take time for a youth to understand how their trafficker coerced and manipulated them, possibly more time than law enforcement is able to commit to an investigation.

Child trafficking victims may also exhibit behaviors that resemble resistance or delinquency. They may refuse to cooperate with investigations, run away from safe

housing placements, or engage in self-destructive behaviors.⁴⁹ Victims are often fearful or distrustful of law enforcement, and may withhold information until trust has been built. If trafficking victims who are minors are not properly identified as victims, they may be funneled into the juvenile justice system as offenders and not be provided with adequate treatment and services. Further, childhood trauma affects the way the brain catalogs and stores memory; thus, a child's memory of events may seem disjointed, contain large gaps, or be unusually specific about sensory information. This can be challenging for investigators and prosecutors who rely solely on victim testimony to piece together victim experiences. Some law enforcement officers report that it is a challenge to ensure the credibility of trafficking victims, and the officers become frustrated when victim statements change over time.⁵⁰

Service needs of child victims

Law enforcement officers find child trafficking cases to be challenging because the needs of victims are so great. Child victims who receive long-term comprehensive services are more likely to stay in services and to cooperate with law enforcement and are less likely to be re-victimized in the future.⁵¹ Child victims of trafficking should be connected to a local victim advocate as quickly as possible for crisis intervention, advocacy, and prompt connection to crucial services. However, not every community has the resources available to support victims of trafficking in a comprehensive way or the specialized training to understand the unique needs of child trafficking victims.


The barrier is that every jurisdiction works differently. We need a uniform approach.
— Deepa Patel, Trauma and Hope, LLC

Victim services agencies bucket services for child trafficking victims into three broad categories:


1. **Emergency services:** safety, food and clothing, interpretation, housing, identification of legal guardianship
2. **Intermediate services:** transitional housing, criminal justice advocacy, medical care, mental health or substance use treatment, mentoring, transportation, financial assistance, familial/guardian support
3. **Long-term services:** child welfare permanency planning or long-term housing, life skills development, job training, education

While many of these programs are readily available in a community, providers may lack the specialization to best serve children who have experienced sex or labor trafficking. Even where these programs exist and are suitable for trafficking

survivors, capacity remains a persistent challenge. Anti-trafficking professionals and community members can access trafficking-specific services by contacting the national hotlines listed below.




Access to Victim Services



NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE
1-888-373-7888

[National Human Trafficking Hotline](https://www.humantraffickinghotline.org/), 1-888-373-7888


The National Hotline is a confidential, multimodal hotline for trafficking survivors and the broader anti-trafficking hotline. Trained hotline advocates can make direct referrals to specialized service providers and law enforcement officers, assist in developing a safety plan and locate housing or transportation for victims and survivors. The hotline is available 24/7 in over 200 languages and can be reached via phone or email or online.



Polaris
Freedom happens now.

[Polaris BeFree Textline](https://www.polarisproject.org/text)
Text BeFree or 233733

BeFree is a confidential text-based hotline for victims and survivors to get help or connect with local services in their area. Currently, the hotline is available from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Eastern. BeFree is staffed by trained Textline advocates who follow specialized texting safety protocols.



NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN
www.missingkids.com

[National Center for Missing and Exploited Children \(NCCMEC\)](https://www.missingkids.com/nccmec/), 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) (CyberTipline to report sexual exploitation of minors)

NCMEC operates the national hotline for missing children. The hotline is available 24/7 for anyone seeking to report a missing child. NCMEC also operates the CyberTipline. Community members and electronic service providers can report instances of child sexual exploitation, child sex trafficking, child sex tourism, child pornography, enticement for sexual acts, or unsolicited obscene materials sent to a child. Reports are reviewed by NCMEC and shared with law enforcement.

Promising practices

Many law enforcement agencies have partnered with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in order to better respond to child trafficking and address the needs of child trafficking victims.

Trauma-informed approach

Several communities have developed partnerships between law enforcement agencies and service providers to prepare law enforcement officers to engage with child trafficking victims. Service providers and law enforcement officers should receive training to help them understand the mindsets of trafficking victims and the impact of trauma. Training on victim-centered interview techniques that are age appropriate and gender responsive is also critical to successful intervention.

Heather Peck Dzewulski of the Loudoun County Department of Family Services says, “It is critically important to have treatment providers who have specialized training in working with trauma. Child victims experience complex and chronic trauma, and that is a different perspective than many clinicians have. It takes highly specialized training and expertise to work with young people to get them to realize what is happening.”

A common theme across the board is trust. Victims of trafficking have had their trust broken. They need to know you are trustworthy. Be persistent and prove you care.
— Caroline Diemar, Polaris

Referral protocols

Law enforcement agencies should identify the relevant resources in their communities for child trafficking victims and develop streamlined referral protocols with local organizations. Law enforcement may consider designating specific points of contact for child labor and sex trafficking cases within local NGOs.

Crisis response partnerships

Los Angeles County, California,⁵² and Suffolk County, Massachusetts,⁵³ have found success in deploying an NGO victim advocate to the scene. This provides the opportunity to immediately build rapport between the child and the advocate who will support them throughout the entire process. This practice provides a trauma-informed, victim-centric response that immediately begins safety planning and connecting children to the appropriate housing and service providers.



Child Welfare Response

[Building Child Welfare Response to Child Trafficking](#), Center for Human Rights for Children, Loyola University Chicago and the International Organization for Adolescents
This handbook is appropriate for any first responders who come into contact with child trafficking victims. It provides recommendations for child welfare responses to child trafficking across identification, Department of Children and families (DCFS) investigations, case management, legal advocacy, and community referrals.

[Blueprint: A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Domestic Sex Trafficking of Girls](#), Center of Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown Law
This guide discusses the importance of shifting the perspective of girls involved in commercial sex from offenders to victims and lays out an action plan to develop a multi-disciplinary task force to address child sex trafficking. The guide uses three community case studies to demonstrate elements of successful multidisciplinary teams.



Child Welfare Response

[Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California](#), California Child Welfare Council

The California Child Welfare Council wrote this report to discuss the realities of CSEC in California, educate stakeholders about the indicators and risk factors seen in CSEC cases, and discuss components of a successful statewide collaborative approach to combatting CSEC in California. Case studies of local programs and interventions are provided throughout the guide.

[Addressing Child Sex Trafficking from A Child Welfare Perspective](#), Casey Family Programs

This report presents findings from a national survey of child welfare leaders to understand their knowledge of child sex trafficking and what more they need to learn about child sex trafficking in order to effectively respond to it in their communities. Responses from 45 jurisdictions provide insight into the service needs of child victims, their contact with law enforcement and child-serving systems, and challenges experienced by child welfare systems in identifying and serving child sex trafficking victims.

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Building Strong Cases

Child trafficking situations may become known to law enforcement through a variety of methods. Patrol officers may encounter child trafficking during traffic stops or in responding to calls for service, cases may be referred from local victim services organizations, or law enforcement may encounter trafficking during the course of proactive investigations into other crimes. Therefore, it is important that law enforcement personnel be trained to recognize indicators of trafficking.

Even when child sex and labor cases are identified, law enforcement agencies with less experience in trafficking cases may have difficulties building strong cases for prosecution. Labor trafficking may be particularly challenging for investigators who lack experience investigating workplace abuses. Law enforcement agencies should engage in interagency collaborations and identify experts to respond to and investigate child trafficking cases effectively.

Challenges

Reluctance of child victims to cooperate

As discussed in the previous section, child trafficking victims may be reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement. They may not see themselves as victims, not trust law enforcement or other authority figures, be fearful of the consequences of reporting their situation, or experience trauma symptoms that inhibit their ability to fully cooperate with law enforcement requests.

Given the level of trauma child trafficking victims experience, the types of coercion or prior abuse they may have experienced, and the laws governing victim testimony and privacy of children, it is imperative to build cases that are not dependent on victim testimony. Investigators should gather evidence that corroborates victim

These are not your typical victims. They may not want our assistance. Not all my detectives work trafficking cases. Very early on, I picked one or two detectives that specialize in working with juveniles. They understand the complexity of these cases and how to work within multi-disciplinary teams.
— Lieutenant Jamie Sanford,
Leesburg Police Department

statements, and, when possible, precludes the need for victim testimony. As a result, trafficking cases involving minors may require more covert investigation methods than other cases.⁵⁴

The role of technology

As the world becomes more technologically advanced, so do child trafficking networks. The internet continues to play a vital role in child trafficking operations. Traffickers use online classified ads and buyer review boards to advertise commercial sexual services and social media to recruit and control victims. Law enforcement must become adept at using the internet to investigate potential child trafficking cases.

Promising practices

Leveraging technology for investigative purposes

Law enforcement agencies have begun to rely heavily on the internet to uncover and investigate child trafficking cases. Information such as a phone number or nickname can be tracked to build child sex trafficking cases. In recent years, lawsuits against Backpage have alleged that the website was complicit in child trafficking operations by knowingly allowing advertisements of commercial sex services involving minors to be posted to the site.⁵⁵ These lawsuits, related congressional actions, and advocacy campaigns discourage credit card companies from using the site, in an attempt to prevent child trafficking by eliminating a recruitment and advertisement source for traffickers.⁵⁶

Additionally, law enforcement agencies continue to leverage social media in tracking and building cases against child traffickers. Traffickers have been known to use social media to bully or blackmail victims and even to promote their businesses and brag about their successes.⁵⁷

Technology companies have joined the anti-trafficking movement by applying their capabilities to aid investigations into child trafficking. Companies such as Thorn, Microsoft, Salesforce, and Twilio have developed technology solutions to aid in the fight against trafficking. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency developed Memex to aid law enforcement with investigative searches of the open web and dark web. Notably, law enforcement agencies have found success in using software to cull and aggregate data from online commercial sex ads and to identify locations or children depicted in commercial sex images online.⁵⁸

Child protection during investigations

Investigators and prosecutors should take particular care to keep the best interest of the child in mind throughout investigations. Investigators should employ trauma-informed approaches to interviewing and engaging with child victims, showing concern for the child's wellbeing and being responsive to trauma. Investigators and prosecutors can reduce the risk of re-traumatization by reducing the number of interviews required of the child, conducting interviews in safe spaces such as child advocacy centers, providing sufficient time with a victim advocate prior to interviews to allow the child to return to a state of physiological and psychological normalcy, and providing the child with an advocate or guardian ad litem for support.⁵⁹

Prosecutors can further protect children's privacy and safety by limiting personally identifiable information in court documents where possible. Prosecutors can promote the victim's safety by requesting no-contact orders, electronic monitoring of defendants, and secure waiting areas for the victim during trial. Other efforts can be made to promote the victim's sense of psychological safety, such as requesting a closed circuit feed of victim testimony or preparing the victim for what to expect during a trial. In some states, rape shield laws may apply to child sex trafficking cases, to prevent the admission of the victim's sexual history.⁶⁰ This may encourage victims to testify.



Law Enforcement Investigations

[Child Sex Trafficking Toolkit for Law Enforcement](#), International Association for Chiefs of Police (IACP)

IACP's guide provides law enforcement leaders with recommendations for responding to child sex trafficking situations in their communities. The guide discusses the nature of child sex trafficking cases, challenges in combatting child sex trafficking, steps for law enforcement to take in response to child sex trafficking, and ways to build successful multidisciplinary partnerships.

[H.E.A.T. Watch Law Enforcement Toolkit](#), Alameda County District Attorney's Office

Alameda County provides lessons learned from the H.E.A.T. Watch program and local law enforcement efforts to combat human trafficking. This toolkit is only available for law enforcement officers. It covers a wide range of topics, such as dispelling misconceptions about exploited youth; victimology; and promising practices for identifying child sex trafficking, interviewing victims, collecting evidence for investigations, and navigating technology and social media in trafficking cases.

[Improving Offender Accountability in CSEC Cases: Tools for Investigating and Prosecuting Adult Exploiters](#), Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families and Emory Law

This guide focuses on the investigative and prosecutorial tools available in Georgia to hold adult exploiters accountable for CSEC offenses. The guide discusses strategies for evidence-gathering, investigating allegations of CSEC, educating jury pools, and protecting child victims throughout the course of an investigation and prosecution.

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Conclusion

Combatting child trafficking is a complex endeavor. No law enforcement agency or service provider organization can do it alone. The most successful community-based responses to child trafficking involve robust partnerships, strategic investments, and sustainability plans.

Partnering for success

Collaboration is the key to successful community-wide anti-trafficking efforts. Law enforcement agencies that invest in community partnerships receive more tips and experience better outcomes. Partnerships create the opportunity to leverage existing resources, develop standardized protocols and response frameworks, reach wider audiences, and build community momentum in support of anti-trafficking work.

These partnerships can take a number of formats, such as task forces, coalitions, or coordinating councils. Since 2004, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has provided funding to nearly 50 communities to host human trafficking task forces under the Enhanced Collaborative Model to Combat Human Trafficking. These task forces are typically composed of federal law enforcement agencies, such as the FBI; Department of Homeland Security (DHS); Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; local, state, or tribal law enforcement; local, state, or federal prosecutors; state or local government agencies; victim service providers; and community advocacy organizations. DOJ also implemented Anti-Trafficking Coordination Teams (ACTeams) to enhance the prosecution of human trafficking cases. Studies have shown that federally funded task forces are more likely to identify and investigate cases of human trafficking, as task force members are better resourced, trained, and prepared than their non-task-force counterparts.

Several states and communities have dedicated state or local funding to similar efforts. Los Angeles County recognized that CSEC was an emerging issue for its community and developed the Law Enforcement Protocol for CSEC.⁶¹ This protocol lays out the roles and responsibilities of partner agencies (e.g., law enforcement, the DCFS child protection hotline and multidisciplinary team, the probation department, advocacy agencies, shelters, medical services) when a child has been identified as a possible trafficking victim. The protocol provides law enforcement patrol officers with clear steps and contact information to initiate referrals for medical care, victim

advocacy, and housing. Notably, the protocol requires the deployment of a victim advocate to the staging area within 90 minutes of notification to meet with the victim. Not only has this protocol increased and expedited access to victim assistance, but Los Angeles County has also seen positive outcomes in terms of victims' long-term voluntary participation in services. At the time of publication, nearly 60 percent of children voluntarily remained in safe, unlocked housing placements and very few children were detained by law enforcement.⁶²

The state of Minnesota developed the No Wrong Door model to respond to child trafficking statewide. No Wrong Door involves 27 partner agencies, including law enforcement, NGOs, and state agencies, to ensure that children who have been trafficked have access to supportive, victim-centered services, regardless of their entry point. No Wrong Door uses the Safe Harbor legislation model,⁶³ which excludes minors under the age of 16 from the definition of delinquent children. Children ages 16 and 17 are directed to mandatory diversion programs.⁶⁴ The Minnesota state legislature developed the framework for the Safe Harbor legislation and the state secured grant funding to support the framework until ongoing funding could be allocated. Regional navigators ensure that housing and service referrals are made for children identified by partner agencies.

Recommendations for partnerships

1. **Identify the right partners.** Interagency collaborations should include representatives from local government; local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement; courts; corrections and probation; child welfare; runaway and homeless youth organizations; mental health and substance use programs; service organizations specific to child trafficking victims; schools; and mentorship and job training programs.
2. **Develop a convening body to guide partnerships across the community.** Whether a community uses a task force model, coalition, or coordinating council, it is important to develop a formal structure to guide collaboration. Strategic planning can aid in mission alignment, activity prioritization, and role delineation for participating organizations. Referral protocols and memorandums of understanding can be used to define roles, responsibilities, and expectations, and to ensure that partners are ready to mobilize when law enforcement encounters child trafficking situations.
3. **Create a data collection system and information-sharing protocol.** Data collection systems for human trafficking are often siloed, with data not being shared across specific funding streams or across local agencies; this makes it difficult to measure the incidence of trafficking. When privacy laws allow, information-sharing protocols can help prevent trafficking victims from

unnecessarily undergoing repeated intake and disclosure processing and interviews.

4. **Evaluate your success.** Very little research exists on the effectiveness of specific child trafficking programs and interventions. Program evaluations are crucial for determining whether investments are sufficient to achieve predetermined objectives and anticipated outcomes.
5. **Leverage community resources for outreach and prevention work.** Anti-trafficking collaborations should dedicate time and resources to proactive prevention activities.



Task Forces

Available Technical Assistance for Task Forces:

- [Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide, OVCTTAC](#)
OVCTTAC provides training and technical assistance (TTA) to victim service providers, the victims they serve, and their communities. TTA services include online trainings, expert consultations, and professional development scholarships. OVCTTAC provides specific technical assistance on task force management and hosts an e-Guide for human trafficking task forces.
- [Human Trafficking Task Force Technical Assistance, IACP](#)
IACP provides law enforcement-related TTA to BJA/OVC-funded task forces to strengthen multi-agency collaboration, investigation, and prosecutions. TTA services include trainings, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and targeted technical assistance.
- [Advanced Human Trafficking Investigations Training for Task Forces, UMCPI](#)
UMCPI provides specialized trainings on human trafficking for investigators, prosecutors, judges, hotel and casino employees, and Native American communities.

Examples of Task Force Protocols for CSEC:

- [Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children, Los Angeles County, CA](#)
The Los Angeles County Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol for CSEC outlines roles and responsibilities for first responders encountering a potential CSEC victim, including law enforcement, the DCFS child protection hotline, the DCFS multi-agency response team, probation, advocacy agencies, shelters, and the medical hub at the Department of Health Services. Implementation of the Protocol led to enhanced coordination between partner agencies and improved outcomes for children. By 2015, 65 percent of children identified through the Protocol remained in stable, un-locked placements.
- [No Wrong Door, Minnesota](#)
No Wrong Door was implemented as a result of the new Safe Harbor legislation in Minnesota and serves as the statewide protocol for responding to child trafficking cases. The goal of No Wrong Door was to ensure that all sexually trafficked children were properly identified and connected to services, regardless of their access point into the system. Youth who are identified through the juvenile justice system or community and social services are referred to one of six regional navigators funded through the Minnesota Department of Health. Navigators connect child victims with



Task Forces

appropriate housing and support services.

- [Support to End Exploitation Now \(SEEN\)](#), **Suffolk County, MA**
SEEN is one of earliest multidisciplinary coalitions specific to CSEC. The Children's Advocacy Center of Suffolk County provides leadership for SEEN, which involves a network of service providers, including medical providers, housing programs, trauma support professionals, law enforcement, legal advocates, prevention educators, and peer mentors. SEEN builds upon the multi-disciplinary team process common in child welfare settings and is guided by a response protocol.

Notes

¹ This definition is provided by the TVPA (22 U.S.C. § 7102(9)-(10) and outlines the eligibility for victim services. See 18 U.S.C. §1589 for the federal criminal definition of *labor trafficking*, which it describes as obtaining labor or services through any means of force, threat of serious harm, abuse of the person or legal process, or by means of any scheme, plan or pattern to cause the person to believe they would suffer serious harm or restraint if they did not comply. See Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), *Child Labor Trafficking*, for more introductory information regarding child labor trafficking.

² Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, Public Law 106-386, U.S. Statutes at Large 22 (2000): 7201.

³ CSEC is not legally defined by federal statute or case law. However, several federal criminal provisions can be applied to conduct that falls within this definition of CSEC, including 18 U.S.C. §§ 1591, 2251, and 2423(c). See OJJDP, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, for more information and training on CSEC.

⁴ California Child Welfare Council, *Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California*, 9-21; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children, Youth and Families, *Guidance to States and Services on Addressing Human Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States*, 2-3; Williamson and Prior, “Domestic minor sex trafficking: A network of underground players in the Midwest,” 46-61; Fedina, Williamson, and Perdue, “Risk Factors for Domestic Child Sex Trafficking in the United States.”

⁵ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, *Child Sex Trafficking*.

⁶ Murphy, *Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth: A Ten-City Study*, 4.

⁷ Bouche, Farrell, and Wittmer, *Identifying Effective Counter-Trafficking Programs and Practices*, 30-7.

⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Legislative Framework,” 112-16.

⁹ CNA, “Human Trafficking.”

- ¹⁰ Godoy, Sadwick, and Baca, *Shedding Light on Sex Trafficking*, 1-31.
- ¹¹ Farrell et al., *Understanding and Improving Law Enforcement Responses to Human Trafficking*, 22; De Baca and Tisi, *Working Together to Stop Modern-Day Slavery*, 78.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 2-3.
- ¹³ Clawson and Dutch, *Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking*, 2.
- ¹⁴ Bouche, Farrell, and Wittmer, *Identifying Effective Counter-Trafficking Programs and Practices*, 30-7.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ¹⁶ Bastedo, *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Male Minors in the United States*, 4, 6-7; Willis, *And Boys Too*, 1-2.
- ¹⁷ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), *Combatting Child Sex Trafficking: A Guide for Law Enforcement Leaders*, 4.
- ¹⁸ Bassan, *Validation of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool (CSE-IT) Technical Report*, 9.
- ¹⁹ National Human Trafficking Hotline, *Working with Foreign National Children Victims of Trafficking*.
- ²⁰ Farrell et al., *Identifying Challenges to Improve the Investigation and Prosecution of States and Local Human Trafficking Cases*, 4.
- ²¹ Children's Bureau, *Human Trafficking and Child Welfare: A Guide for Child Welfare Agencies*, 6.
- ²² Among other provisions, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (Public Law 114-22) clarifies that children who are not trafficked by a third party are still considered victims of trafficking and that buyers may be held culpable under the federal trafficking statute. The Preventing Child Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-183) set new requirements for child welfare agencies to proactively identify youth at risk of trafficking, implement policies and programs to serve youth at risk of trafficking, and report children who run from care to NCMEC and law enforcement within certain timeframes and parameters.
- ²³ While federal law does not limit the definition of a child sex trafficking victim to a minor that has been trafficked by a third party, many state child welfare laws limit services to youth that have been abused by a parent or guardian.
- ²⁴ Farrell et al., *Identifying Challenges to Improve the Investigation and Prosecution of States and Local Human Trafficking Cases*, 37.

- ²⁵ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies, *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the U.S.*, 13-18.
- ²⁶ Lagon, “Traits of Transformative Anti-Trafficking Partnerships,” 26-7.
- ²⁷ Polaris, *Human Trafficking Issue Brief: Safe Harbor*, 1.
- ²⁸ Government Accountability Office, *Human Trafficking: Agencies Have Taken Steps to Assess Prevalence, Address Victim Issues, and Avoid Grant Duplication*, 1.
- ²⁹ Inzano, *Promising Criminal Justice Practices in Human Trafficking Cases*, 7.
- ³⁰ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), *Combatting Child Sex Trafficking*.
- ³¹ National Human Trafficking Hotline, *Human Trafficking Public Outreach Campaigns*.
- ³² Clawson and Dutch, *Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking*, 6.
- ³³ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), *Combatting Child Sex Trafficking*, 10.
- ³⁴ Shared Hope International, *Justice for Juveniles*, 6.
- ³⁵ Epstein and Edelman, *Blueprint: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, 4.
- ³⁶ California Child Welfare Council, *Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, 4-8.
- ³⁷ Florida Department of Children and Families, *DJJ Launches new Human Trafficking Screening Tool Statewide*.
- ³⁸ California Child Welfare Council, *Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, 33.
- ³⁹ WestCoast Children’s Clinic, *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation—Identification Tool*.
- ⁴⁰ Langs, *CSE-IT Pilot Update*, 4.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁴³ See SAMHSA, *Trauma-Informed Approaches*, for a definition of trauma-informed approaches. Also, see the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “12 core

concepts for understanding child traumatic stress responses in children and youth who are trafficked,” for more information about traumatic stress in child sex trafficking.

⁴⁴ Dank, Yu, and Yahner, *Health Outcomes, Substance Use and Abuse, and Service Provision for LGBTQ Youth, YMSM, and YWSW Who Engage in Survival Sex*, 74; Farrell et al., *Identifying Challenges to Improve the Investigation and Prosecution of State and Local Human Trafficking Cases*, 7.

⁴⁵ United States Department of Health and Human Services Children’s Bureau, *Child Welfare and Human Trafficking*, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 11-12.

⁴⁷ Similar to victims of torture, trafficking victims have been found to exhibit signs of Stockholm syndrome or have developed other strong bonds with their traffickers or co-victims. This is often referred to as “trauma bonding” by victim service providers who assist child sex trafficking and CSEC victims. See Llorens and Wirsing, *Treatment with Commercially Sexually Exploited Children*, 26; Warpinski, *Know Your Victim*, 17-18; Hopper and Hidalgo, “Invisible Chains,” 185-209.

⁴⁸ IOM and NRC, *Confronting the Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*, 77-120; Walker and Quraishi, *From Abused and Neglected to Abused and Exploited*, 7-11.

⁴⁹ Walker and Quraishi, *From Abused and Neglected to Abused and Exploited*, 7-11.

⁵⁰ Farrell et al., *Identifying Challenges to Improve the Investigation and Prosecution of States and Local Human Trafficking Cases*, 8.

⁵¹ IOM and NRC, *Confronting the Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*, 77-120.

⁵² County of Los Angeles, CA, *Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol*.

⁵³ Children’s Advocacy Center of Suffolk County, *Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN)*.

⁵⁴ Farrell et al., *Understanding and Improving Law Enforcement Responses to Human Trafficking*, 223; Lynch, Tucker, and Widner, *Improving Offender Accountability in CSEC Cases*, 5.

⁵⁵ Hackler, “Inconsistencies in Combatting the Sex Trafficking of Minors,” 1110.

⁵⁶ This argument is not without contention. It should be noted that not all advertisements on Backpage or similar websites involve the trafficking of children or sexual exploitation involving force, fraud, or coercion. Critics of this perspective note

that eliminating online sources of advertisements increases the risk for those selling sex because they must vet potential buyers in person. Additionally, critics argue that shutting down online classifieds eliminates a valuable set of data that law enforcement can trace.

⁵⁷ Polaris, *Knocking at Your Door*, 17-18.

⁵⁸ Sadwick, *7 Ways Technology is Fighting Human Trafficking*.

⁵⁹ Lynch, Tucker, and Widner, *Improving Offender Accountability*, 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-6.

⁶¹ County of Los Angeles, CA, *Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol*, 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶³ Safe Harbor laws refer to a model of state laws intended to address the legal challenges faced by minors engaged in commercial sex. While federal law recognizes that all minors engaged in commercial sex are trafficking victims and should not be prosecuted for commercial sex crimes, not all state laws have the same definition or age parameters. Safe Harbor laws provide an avenue for minors to be provided immunity from such charges or to be diverted to services through diversion programming. See Polaris, *Human Trafficking Issue Brief: Safe Harbor* and National Conference of State Legislatures, *Safe Harbor* for general information about Safe Harbor laws. See Shared Hope, *JuST Response State System Mapping Project* for a detailed comparison of state Safe Harbor laws.

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