



## U. S. Department of Justice

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE COMMEMORATES NATIONAL SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION MONTH**

**TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA** – On February 2, 2022, U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland released the Justice Department's new *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* pursuant to the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act.

Rooted in the foundational pillars and priorities of the interagency *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*, which President Biden [released](#) on Dec. 3, 2021, the Justice Department's *National Strategy* is expansive in scope. It aims to enhance the department's capacity to prevent human trafficking; to prosecute human trafficking cases; and to support and protect human trafficking victims and survivors.

“Human trafficking is an insidious crime,” said Attorney General Garland. “Traffickers exploit and endanger some of the most vulnerable members of our society and cause their victims unimaginable harm. The Justice Department’s new *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* will bring the full force of the Department to this fight.”

“Human trafficking is an abomination,” said United States Attorney Jason R. Coody. “With no regard for human dignity, traffickers inflict indescribable physical harm to their victims and often leave emotional scars that cannot be healed. With our law enforcement partners, our office remains committed to aggressively prosecuting those who must be held accountable for their despicable crimes.”

The United States Attorney’s Office joins law enforcement’s combined efforts to inform and protect communities across the district throughout the year. According to the Florida Department of Children and Families and based on the human trafficking intake rate per 100 children in the population, the Panhandle had one of the highest rates of reporting of human trafficking between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021. U.S. Attorney Coody highlights efforts by federal, state, and local partners to prevent and combat human trafficking in the Northern District of Florida (NDFL) held during January’s National Slavery and Human Trafficking Month.

Numerous human trafficking trainings and events included the following:

- **On January 6, 2022, Perspectives Call in Radio Show on WFSU (88.9 FM):** A panel of representatives from the community and beyond, including Sheriff Walt McNeil, Marsha Crowell from Capital City Bank, STAC, and a survivor of human trafficking, discussed the role of the business sector and local governments in recognizing and safely responding to human trafficking issues.
- **On January 11, 2022, the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit (Panama City area) Human Trafficking Task Force:** The Task Force hosted a candlelight vigil lighting at the foot of the Hathaway Bridge in hopes of lighting the way to freedom for many victims. The purpose of the event was to bring awareness to the community, as well as to focus on human trafficking trends in the Florida Panhandle.
- **On January 14, 2022, the North Central Florida Human Trafficking Task Force:** “HT8” held its annual meeting in Gainesville, Florida. The purpose of the meeting was educate and engage members of the community in the fight against human trafficking. Various members of the community were recognized for their efforts by receiving the RISE (Recognition of Individuals Service with Excellence) Award.
- **On January 20, 2022, 5th Annual Gadsden County Anti-Human Trafficking Forum:** This program focused on social justice and human trafficking in Gadsden County and a call to action by and for the community and survivors.
- **On January 20, 2022, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center:** conducted a special human trafficking training session in Gainesville, Florida for area law enforcement officers. The training was designed to provide a better understanding of human trafficking in its various forms. The presentation included a guest speaker who spoke about human trafficking victim trauma and was followed by a panel discussion with local area experts.
- **On January 20, 2022, the Circuit 1 (Pensacola area) Human Trafficking Task Force:** The Task Force partnered with the University of West Florida and other community leaders to host their Annual Human Trafficking Summit. This year’s theme was “A Survivor-Centered Approach: Bringing Their Voices to the Table.” The summit kicked off with a “Human Trafficking 101” training which tackled the real-life facts and truths of human trafficking while demystifying the common myths and misconceptions about what it is and what it is not. This presentation was followed by a survivor panel discussion which detailed the stories of three human trafficking survivors and their trauma. The summit concluded with discussions on how we can better respond as a community and as service providers.
- **On January 21, 2022, Human Trafficking and Businesses:** The Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center (STAC), with funding from Leon County, Florida, developed a training initiative to give the thousands of businesses and others in our area information about what to look for, how to recognize signs and patterns of sex or labor trafficking and what to do if they suspect human trafficking is occurring.
- **On January 24, 2022, Whole Child Leon Professional Network Community Conversation – Human Trafficking: Prevention, Intervention and Victim Services:** In observance of National Slavery and Human Trafficking Awareness Month, The Starr Institute and the Open Doors Outreach Network teamed up to share information and provide resources to help us stay informed and make a difference.

- **On January 25, 2022, the Impact of Human Trafficking on Campus:** This panel discussion focused on how human trafficking can occur in our state's higher education campuses and how institutions of higher learning can and should respond. Presenters were from Florida State University, Tallahassee Community College, Florida A&M University, Florida International University, the International Rescue Committee, and STAC.
- **On January 27, 2022, Human Trafficking, and the Law: Labor Trafficking: Labor Trafficking:** This program focused on both the civil and criminal sides of the justice system – and our entire community – are vitally important to recognizing this reality, preventing forced labor, and fully supporting survivors.

In addition to providing education, prevention, and technical and training assistance, the USAO-NDFL also vigorously prosecutes human trafficking crimes. Most recently, NDFL joined its federal, state, and local partners in Operation Stolen Innocence, which resulted in the investigation and federal prosecution of 19 defendants for victimizing a child in the Tallahassee area. In 2021, three defendants were convicted following jury trials. Thirteen defendants pled guilty, and three cases are pending trial. A collective 840 months in federal prison have been imposed for those have been sentenced thus far.

Among other things, the Justice Department's multi-year strategy to combat all forms of human trafficking will:

- Strengthen engagement, coordination, and joint efforts to combat human trafficking by prosecutors in all 94 U.S. Attorneys' Offices and by federal law enforcement agents nationwide.
- Establish federally funded, locally led anti-human trafficking task forces that support sustained state law enforcement leadership and comprehensive victim assistance.
- Step up departmental efforts to end forced labor by increasing attention, resources and coordination in labor trafficking investigations and prosecutions.
- Enhance initiatives to reduce vulnerability of American Indians and Alaska Natives to violent crime, including human trafficking, and to locate missing children.
- Develop and implement new victim screening protocols to identify potential human trafficking victims during law enforcement operations and encourage victims to share important information.
- Increase capacity to provide victim-centered assistance to trafficking survivors, including by supporting efforts to deliver financial restoration to victims.
- Expand dissemination of federal human trafficking training, guidance, and expertise.
- Advance innovative demand-reduction strategies.

The department's strategy will be implemented under the direction of the National Human Trafficking Coordinator designated by the Attorney General in accordance with the Abolish Human Trafficking Act of 2017.

If you believe that you or someone you know may be a victim of human trafficking, please contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or Text 233733.

To read the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking click [here](#).

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation's principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access available public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](#) website. For more information about the United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

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