



NORA VARGAS
SUPERVISOR, FIRST DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: January 25, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

COUNTY ACTIONS TO ENHANCE HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION AND COORDINATION (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery, in which victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of commercial sex, debt bondage, or forced labor. Trafficking of persons occurs throughout the world, including in the United States and victims can include young children, teenagers, men, and women.

According to the FBI, in 2005 San Diego ranked among the 13 worst regions in the United States for child sex trafficking.¹ A 2016 study conducted by the University of San Diego and Point Loma Nazarene estimated that the illicit sex economy in San Diego County was \$810 million dollars, with an estimate of 3,000 to 8,000 survivors each year.² The study also revealed that the average age for a victim is 16 years old with many younger at 12, 13, 14 and 15 years of age. Furthermore, the study found that 80 percent of the victims are U.S. citizens and that 90 percent of schools studied across San Diego County had documented cases of human trafficking.

Today's actions demonstrate the County of San Diego's (County) continued commitment to combat human trafficking in our region and provide the critical services and support to survivors of human trafficking. These actions call for a strengthened partnership between the County's Public Safety Group and Health and Human Services Agency along with community partners to develop recommendations for establishing a peer support navigator program for survivors of human trafficking that can help navigate the services/programs available to them as they transition into independence. Additionally, it calls for developing recommendations to enhance efforts to provide an educational campaign to raise awareness about this critical issue. I urge your strong support.

¹ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249857.pdf>

² <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249857.pdf>

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**RECOMMENDATION(S)
SUPERVISOR NORA VARGAS**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with appropriate Public Safety Group departments such as the District Attorney’s Office and Probation in coordination with Health and Human Service Agency departments, including, but not limited to Self Sufficiency Services, Behavioral Health Services, Child Welfare Services, Public Health Services to develop recommendations for establishing a peer support navigator program for survivors of human trafficking.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop recommendations for a strategy to coordinate victim-centered, culturally competent and trauma informed services including, housing, behavioral health services, family services, legal assistance, employment readiness and job placement, and other services deemed necessary or appropriate to provide the greatest opportunity for survivors of human trafficking to be free of exploitation and thrive.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop victim-centered, culturally competent and trauma informed recommendations for enhancing educational efforts to raise awareness to recognize the signs of human trafficking and work in partnership with stakeholders to spread the message.
4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to assess the current services and resources available and receive survivor, community and stakeholder input and engagement, in order to develop meaningful recommendations to address human trafficking.
5. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board of Supervisors within 180 days with any findings and final recommendations on enhancements and new strategies to implement in the areas mentioned in Recommendations 1 through 4, including program costs and funding sources.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

San Diego County is among one of the highest regions in the United States with human trafficking, with anywhere from 3,000 to 8,000 victims each year. Human trafficking victims can be of any age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, immigration status, cultural background, religion, socio-economic class, and education attainment level. In the United States, individuals vulnerable to human trafficking include children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, including foster care, runaway and homeless youth, racial or ethnic minorities, migrant laborers, LGBTQ+ individuals, and victims of intimate partner violence or other forms of domestic violence, to name a few.

Today’s proposed action demonstrates the County of San Diego’s (County) continued commitment to combat human trafficking in our region and provide the critical services and support to survivors of human trafficking as they transition to independence. Specifically, by working with the relevant County partners, such as Public Safety Group and Health and Human Services Agency, along with community-based organization partners, the County will provide a comprehensive family-centered focused approach to deliver wraparound services to survivors of human trafficking. This action will further strengthen and enhance outreach efforts especially around our youth population as a mechanism to raise awareness and help prevent human trafficking from occurring in our region.

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FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended actions to explore and develop strategies to strengthen efforts to combat human trafficking. When staff report back, fiscal impacts associated with recommendations of various strategies to implement will be identified for Board approval pending availability of funding.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery, in which victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of commercial sex, debt bondage, or forced labor. Trafficking of persons occurs throughout the world, including in the United States and victims can include young children, teenagers, men, and women.

Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 “severe forms of trafficking in persons” includes both sex trafficking and labor trafficking, which are defined as follows:

Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age (*22 USC § 7102*).

Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery, (*22 USC § 7102*).

Among the most disproportionately targeted at-risk populations include individuals who have experienced or been exposed to other forms of violence (child abuse and maltreatment, interpersonal violence and sexual assault, community, and gang violence) and individuals disconnected from stable support networks (runaway and homeless youth, unaccompanied minors, etc.).

According to the FBI, in 2005 San Diego was ranked among the 13 worst regions in the U.S. for child sex trafficking. In these past 15 years, San Diego County has increased efforts to combat human trafficking and support survivors. A 2016 study conducted by the University of San Diego and Point Loma Nazarene estimated that the illicit sex economy in San Diego County was \$810 million dollars, with an estimate of 3,000 to 8,000 survivors each year. The study also revealed that the average age for a victim is 16 years old with many younger at 12, 13, 14 and 15 years of age. The study found that 80 percent of the victims are US citizens and that 90 percent of schools studied across the county had documented cases of human trafficking. Furthermore,

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the report revealed that gangs have taken to sex trafficking as one of their criminal activities due to the large profit and difficulty in detecting the crime and identifying victims.

Human trafficking is of particular concern and poses a big threat because it is the second most profitable illegal industry, second only to the drug trade. While drugs are sold in one transaction, human beings can be sold repeatedly, putting already vulnerable individuals at risk of entering a dangerous cycle of exploitation where costs are low, and profits are extremely high.

The County of San Diego (County) through its numerous efforts has been working diligently to combat human trafficking and help meet the needs of human trafficking survivors. Crimes revolving around human and labor trafficking tend to occur outside of normal business hours, requiring tailored interventions and staff accessibility on a 24/7/365 days a year basis to facilitate immediate access for survivors. The District Attorney's Office through the Sex Crimes and Human Trafficking Division which is composed of a highly trained and specialized team of Deputy District Attorneys, District Attorney Investigators, paralegals, and secretaries, has been dedicated to just prosecution of perpetrators of sexual assault and human trafficking crimes. Earlier this year, the District Attorney's Office also established a new Workplace Justice Unit. Working closely with the Labor Commission's Office, this new unit will focus on prosecuting criminal business practices such as wage theft and labor trafficking. Additionally, the North County Family Justice Center will open in early 2022 to provide an array of wraparound services for human trafficking survivors including therapy, legal services, case management, housing navigation, food assistance, and workforce preparation.

The San Diego County Probation Department (Probation) supports young people, who are simultaneously human trafficking survivors and supervised by Probation for other matters, through participation in the Resiliency Is Strength and Empowerment (RISE) collaborative court. RISE is supported by dedicated probation officers working with a dedicated juvenile court judge, deputy district attorney, deputy public defender, Behavioral Health Services (BHS) staff, Child Welfare Services (CWS) staff, and soon, a dedicated, license-eligible clinician, to offer a therapeutic, trauma-informed approach to helping human trafficking survivors supervised by Probation. Additionally, the Board of Supervisors established the Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Advisory Council that is tasked with identifying and forwarding best practices for combatting human trafficking and with making recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding countywide anti-trafficking policies.

The Sheriff's Department also contributes significant investigative resources towards the San Diego Human Trafficking Task Force, a multi-agency task force specializing in monitoring and investigating human trafficking related incidents, to identify and apprehend suspects who traffic and/or abuse victims, while simultaneously working to recover victims and direct them to services.

The County also has services/resources in place to help meet the needs of survivors such as the Trafficking and Crime Victim Assistance program, which provides Medi-Cal coverage, monetary and food assistance. The ICARE program through BHS and CWS offers therapeutic care for youth who have been sexually exploited, as well as providing a Drop-in Center as a safe, confidential place where the youth can learn adaptive skills, build resiliency, and find

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community. CWS has also launched the CSEC Response Team (CRT) Protocol that would enable a social worker, a peer advocate, and law enforcement to provide an immediate joint response when a youth is identified as being trafficked.

In terms of prevention, CWS and the District Attorney's Office partnered in 2016 to bring the Ugly Truth campaign to San Diego County. The campaign advertisements were displayed in English and Spanish at national events such as Comic Con and the Major League Baseball All-Star Game. Additionally, in 2018 and 2019, CWS partnered with the DA's office and Abolitionist Mom, an anti-human trafficking organization, to help promote awareness among youth through the campaign, Disrupt Sex Trafficking. Most recently, CWS, with the support of the Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board, sponsored Summer Movies in The Park, where the Disrupt Sex Trafficking advertisements ran before movies in parks across the County from June through October 2021.

CWS has implemented further prevention practices including early identification and linkage to targeted services for youth who are at risk of experiencing human trafficking. With early identification, all youth who are suspected to be victims of child abuse and/or maltreatment ages 12 and up are screened with a validated tool to assess risk level of being trafficked. If the risk level for a youth is high, a multidisciplinary team consisting of CWS, BHS, Public Health Services, Probation, the Juvenile Court, law enforcement, and additional community partners collaborate to identify supports and services that would address the specific factors that put a child at risk.

While San Diego is at the forefront in the fight against human trafficking, our county continues to face challenges, which have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This in turn has placed already vulnerable populations at even higher risk of becoming victims. While our economic and social sector was gravely impacted by the pandemic and came to a standstill, unfortunately, for human trafficking this illicit industry continued to operate and even flourish. In the first half of 2020, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reported 90% increase in the number of reports it received. Also, the San Diego Regional Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force reported triple and quadruple numbers starting in April 2020 and continuing throughout 2020. Just in 2021 alone, the San Diego Human Trafficking Task Force, coordinated eight large scale demand reduction operations throughout San Diego County. Additionally, with the closure of schools there was a 51% reduction, between calendar year 2019 and 2020, of reports to the County Child Abuse Hotline from school site professionals and teachers.

It is imperative that the County reaffirms its commitment to combat human trafficking in our region and provide the critical wraparound services needed to support survivors of human trafficking and their families. To do so, today's recommendations call for a strengthened partnership between the County's Public Safety Group and the Health and Human Services Agency along with community partners to develop recommendations for establishing a peer support navigator program for survivors of human trafficking that can help navigate the services/programs available to them as they transition into independence. A peer support navigator program will work with appropriate departments from PSG, HHSA and community partners with the goal of achieving consistency for every survivor in need of services. Survivors

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often have several social workers, probation officers, and advocates, each of whom the victim has to relay their story, which can induce trauma and create a challenge to build trust between survivors and the people and programs offering them support.

Consistency and engagement are the key to success with services. A peer support navigator program should strive for consistency and work for the betterment of the survivor. In order to achieve this goal, the peer support navigator program will serve as a liaison and will work with survivors directly. Furthermore, the creation of a strategy to coordinate wraparound services including, housing, behavioral health, legal assistance, employment readiness, among other services will provide the greatest opportunity to ensure that survivors are able to thrive.

With children being one of the most vulnerable populations at risk of human trafficking, it is important that the County enhance current efforts for an educational campaign countywide and raise awareness about human trafficking among both youth and parents, to prevent human trafficking. As a starting point to this educational campaign, the County should continue its work with the San Diego County Office of Education to ensure that the evidence based, age appropriate, human trafficking prevention education program is provided at all schools across the county.

I urge your strong support.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions support the Building Better Health and Living Safely initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, as well as the County's Live Well San Diego vision by the County of San Diego reaffirming its commitment to combat human trafficking and provide the critical services and support to survivors of human trafficking as they transition to independence in a manner that is compassionate, respectful, and sensitive to the human trafficking survivors' needs.

Respectfully submitted,



NORA VARGAS
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A