

**FORT BEND COUNTY HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE  
YEAR-END REPORT  
2013-2014**

**PRESENTED TO:**

**FORT BEND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT  
DECEMBER 9, 2014**

## **Fort Bend County Human Trafficking Task Force Year-end Report – 2013-2014**

### **Committee Members –**

James Shoemake, District Judge, 434<sup>th</sup> District Court – Committee Chair

Chad Bridges, Chief Prosecutor Family Violence, District Attorney

Dr. Connie Almeida, Director, Behavioral Health Services

Mike Enax, Director, Community Supervision and Corrections

Kyle Dobbs, Director, Juvenile Probation

Huma Ahmed, Assistant County Attorney, County Attorney

Tim Morris, Sergeant, Criminal Investigation Division, Sheriff's Office

Lori Ann Belin, Community Relations Manager, Commissioner Precinct 3

Ann Werlein, Administrative/Budget Manager, County Judge

Jenetha Jones, Grants Coordinator, County Judge

### **Background –**

On October 1, 2013, the committee was formed by order of Commissioners Court to evaluate and address compliance with the 83<sup>rd</sup> legislature regular session Senate Bill 484. The bill requires counties with populations above 200,000 to apply for state funding to establish a specialty court to provide restoration and rehabilitation resources to those convicted of prostitution.

The Committee soon added members from Juvenile Probation and Sheriff's Office to help identify any potential victims of prostitution/trafficking. Adding representation from these offices was critical to the Committee's efforts to identify victims through related data and criminal activity that could be tied to human trafficking and prostitution, such as teen runaway data, drug related crimes, and assault and battery cases involving minors. Juveniles who are in or come through juvenile detention could be screened for trafficking involvement.

Initially, the committee was known as the Fort Bend County Prostitution Prevention Committee but later revised the name to **Fort Bend County Human Trafficking Task Force** to reflect the growing awareness of forced prostitution of domestic minors.

### **Fact Finding –**

Based on initial discussions revealing that *only 3 cases of prostitution were prosecuted in 10 years*, the committee felt that more in-depth study was needed to understand the extent of the problem in Fort Bend County. In addition, the committee recommended submitting a waiver request to opt out of applying for the state funding to establish a specialty court.

Subject matter experts were invited to regular meetings to educate the committee on prostitution/trafficking, particularly on how prostitution has evolved to include domestic minor sex trafficking.

Speakers included:

- Nikki Richnow and Mary Boyd of Freedom Place talked about their rescue mission services and the issues surrounding human trafficking. Freedom Place is a housing resource for victims rescued from trafficking.
- Celena Vinson, Assistant County Attorney, Harris County Attorney's Office, shared what Harris County is doing to combat human trafficking, including their efforts to abate businesses found to have criminal activity associated with prostitution and trafficking. Additionally, Houston/Harris County's response to the issue is a diversion GIRLS Court program (Gaining Independence Restoring Lives). The diversion program operates through Juvenile Probation in Harris County and serves female offenders who are survivors of human trafficking or those who are at risk of being victims of human trafficking and are often forced into a variety of illegal activities, including prostitution.
- Lindsey Speed, Director of Development and Communication with Traffick911 was invited to provide an overview of what human trafficking is, including identifying participant profiles, identifying areas for trafficking potential, risk areas among target populations, and prevention recommendations, including a training component for first responders. Ms. Speed gave a grim profile of what is happening in human trafficking in Houston and warned that Fort Bend County may be facing a similar problem.

Traffick911 is a private advocacy group that educates the public and law enforcement on human trafficking. The organization also provides rehabilitation services to victims. Following this meeting, Traffick911 became instrumental in providing much of the outreach training to Fort Bend area organizations, school districts, law enforcement and girls in juvenile detention.

- Lt. Dustin Claborn of the Stafford Police Department provided an overview of the human trafficking training that he conducts for law enforcement area-wide. The training focuses on investigative practices to learn the physical behavior indicators that lead to victim identification and building rapport with victims. Dustin is now an investigator with the county's District Attorney's Office. He works directly with the Sheriff's Office to develop the human trafficking training, including an advanced level trafficking course.
- Andrea Almaraz, Probation Officer, Juvenile Probation, discussed the need to identify potential victims among young children who are runaways, loners, those who feel disenfranchised and those who spend a lot of unsupervised time online. She explained that these groups are targets of those who seek to exploit children.

#### **Preliminary Findings –**

After several weeks of discussion and hearing from subject experts, ***it has become apparent that the issue of prostitution has evolved to include more domestic minors who often are lured or kidnapped and then forced into prostitution activity.***

The committee believes that:

- 1) the problem of prostitution/human trafficking is a real threat within the County;
- 2) having a training component for law enforcement is essential in order to provide the appropriate response;
- 3) increasing awareness among first responders and other providers is critical;
- 4) more contemporary and social media methods to arrange prostitution activity are now used, and;
- 5) without identified victims who are brought into the County's court system for prostitution related activity there are no victims/clients to place in a program.

#### **Task Force Education Outreach –**

In our meeting on November 21, 2013, the group discussed ideas for hosting a community-wide meeting to raise awareness of human trafficking. We decided to host the **Fort Bend County Human Trafficking Summit** on February 21, 2014, from 9:00-12:00. An expert roster of speakers presented the following topics: legislative update from State Representative Dr. John Zerwas, District 28; service providers Lindsey Speed of Traffick911 and Emily Waters of Freedom Place spoke on the coercive conditions often leading young men and women to fall prey to traffickers; and Harris County Associate Judge Angela Ellis, who oversees a GIRLS court program in the 315<sup>th</sup> Juvenile District Court, discussed the judicial challenges faced by prosecutors and the court system. Additionally, the audience heard the compelling story from author and human trafficking survivor, Holly Austin Smith, who told her story from her perspective as a 13-year old trafficking victim. CLE and TCOLE education credits were offered to attendees.

A recap of the Human Trafficking Summit included:

- 336 pre-registered for the event and 279 attendees signed the registration list.
- Approximately 160 evaluations were completed with an overwhelming majority of responses being positive for having received the information.
- A press release was issued as a follow-up to the event. The evaluation results and a news clip from KRIV-Fox 26 were posted to the county's Behavioral Health Services web page.

#### **Training Efforts –**

Following the Summit, the Committee continued to explore its direction and actions. The committee discussed additional training needs for targeted groups, such as school administrators/counselors, first responders and parents and how it could play a role in getting training to other audiences.

Through the committee's association with Traffick911, a training session was offered to Fort Bend County Adult and Juvenile Probationer staff. At this time, Traffick911 also conducted its first training session with girls held in juvenile detention. The session was attended by Fort Bend County school district counselors and administrators so they would have an opportunity to see first-hand what the training to youths would entail and to encourage them to bring the training to their schools. The training for youth entails "Traps of a Trafficker," an interactive program that equips youth to avoid the tricks, traps and lures of traffickers. A real-time video snapshot showed the number of underage girls that could be solicited online. As a result of this training, several area ISDs reported they would

plan training sessions for their school officials. Having the school districts receive the training offered by Traffick911 is a major accomplishment and one of the goals of the committee.

### **Legislative Initiatives –**

In May 2014, the Fort Bend County District Attorney's office became involved in a case involving a victim of forced prostitution and a protective order was issued. The group discussed the challenges involving cases such as this, including initiatives to increase legislative awareness and increase resources for victims. The committee also sought more clarity in the law on how to treat victims of human trafficking. One of the issues is that the penal code doesn't match the arrest laws. Because of Senator John Whitmire and Senator Joan Huffman's involvement with victims of human trafficking legislation, the Committee reached out to their offices for additional guidance. Senator Huffman is co-chair of the Joint Interim Committee on Human Trafficking.

The committee was directed to follow the activities of the Joint Interim Committee studying human trafficking through the Texas Legislature Online. The committee reviewed the work the legislature had made available up to this point to see which direction it was focused and to help us understand what we needed to ask of them for legislative improvements. Some considerations are: what are the plans in the way of bills for human trafficking that are appropriate for a county of our size as opposed to the larger urban counties; where would we like to see funding directed? We learned that public hearings were planned throughout the state focusing on a separate aspect of human trafficking, one to be held in Houston on prosecution.

On June 26, 2014, the committee met with Senator Huffman and State Representatives Rick Miller and Phil Stephenson to allow them the opportunity to hear what our committee has been doing to address human trafficking and to hear what our concerns and challenges are in dealing with the issue.

Some points shared by Senator Huffman:

- There is a feeling among some in the legislature to decriminalize prostitution.
- There is increased involvement in human trafficking from gangs, organized crime and drug cartels due to profitability.
- The Joint Interim Committee will hold more hearings: 1) Dallas area with a victim services focus; 2) Valley area hearing to focus on border issues and unaccompanied minor children crossing who are potential victims for trafficking and 3) Houston area hearing with prosecutorial focus.
- The JIC will look at where funding is going to combat trafficking. Is the funding making a difference? A unified approach to combat trafficking is needed across the state.

Following our meeting with lawmakers, Judge Shoemaker tasked the committee to develop a list of topics where we would like to see changes made in the laws surrounding sex trafficking. The list was compiled to form our request list to send to lawmakers. For several meetings, the group discussed its recommendations for changes to the laws involving trafficking, including asset forfeiture from perpetrators, using seized property funds to aid victims and victim programs, and other legislative mandates for funding for services. The committee is now focused on making recommendations for the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative session and has worked to define them as they

relate to a specific statute or code. A detailed summary of proposed legislation suggestions is attached to this report. (Attachment C)

In addition, the committee met with Traffick911 and Children at Risk, two organizations involved with human trafficking prevention efforts, to offer suggestions on our draft legislative recommendations. Additional research was conducted on legislative recommendations from nearby counties and agencies that we can piggy-back our recommendations with. Traffick911 suggested submitting our legislative recommendations through our own channels or policy groups so that lawmakers know that these recommendations are coming from multiple sources.

### **Next Steps and Future Recommendations –**

The next step for the committee is to monitor legislative activities on proposed bill changes to help determine our ongoing goals and actions. Other possible future plans include expanding the committee to other community stakeholders, such as representatives from CPS and hotel/motel associations, and also hosting another informational summit on human trafficking.

The committee is hopeful that new funding sources can be identified to manage a program or support an investigator and is working to research these opportunities. Funding may be found from forfeited funds and seizure funds, additional grant opportunities, key organizational partners and stakeholders and possible appropriations mandated through the 84<sup>th</sup> legislative session.

Discussions have been held on identifying agencies to be points of contact to refer any juveniles to rehabilitation services. Plans are in the works for Traffick911 to open a Houston office, which would allow them a regular timetable to offer training to girls in juvenile detention and to screen for trafficking. Children's Protective Services, the Mental Health Public Defender's Office and Parks Youth Ranch can start screening for potential trafficking issues among the populations they serve. Traffick911 could be a resource for training these agencies to help them identify and refer potential victims of trafficking. The Sheriff's Office Intake Division can receive reports from any person or agency and can make referrals for any clients meeting the rehabilitation program criteria.

Meanwhile, Traffick911 recommends that law enforcement agencies follow-up on leads found on BackPage, a website for online solicitation. The committee recognizes that staffing resources are limited to dedicate an investigator full time to proactively look for incidents of trafficking. Possible grant resources could support an investigator until the county can show the need exists and can support a position. The Sheriff's Office and detectives working the Internet Crimes Against Children task force are actively pursuing internet users seeking underage prostitution online and recently, several arrests were made.

### **Conclusion –**

In a Commissioners Court session scheduled for December 9, 2014, the committee presents this year-end report along with a presentation from Traffick911. The presentation is an opportunity to inform Commissioners of our legislative recommendations and request a Resolution of support.

In addition, the presentation allows Commissioners to understand our objective to demonstrate the need to monitor for and investigate cases of human trafficking.

The Fort Bend County Human Trafficking Task Force is committed to continuing this important work to address the needs for continued public education; improve investigations in order to achieve effective prosecution of offenders; identify resources for supporting a program and service agencies, and to assist victims with appropriate services and resources.

**Attachments –**

- A. Meetings Attended and/or Facilitated by Task Force
- B. FY 2015 Goals for Fort Bend County Human Trafficking Task Force
- C. Proposed Legislation for the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature

### Meetings Attended and/or Facilitated by Task Force:

- 11/13/13 Committee member attended luncheon featuring Freedom Place, a rescue and rehabilitation home for trafficking victims. Holly Austin Smith, a survivor of child sex trafficking, is the keynote speaker.
- 2/21/14 Fort Bend County Human Trafficking Summit held at Gus George Law Enforcement Academy with more than 275 attendees from various law enforcement agencies, advocacy and resource groups, and service providers.
- 2/21/14 Area law enforcement received training on Human Trafficking put on by FBCSO and conducted by Lt. Dustin Claborn, Stafford Police Department.
- 5/20/14 Juvenile Probation hosted 4-hour training presented by Traffick911 for Adult and Juvenile Probation officers at the Gus George Academy with overflow attendance.
- 5/20/14 Girls held in juvenile detention received training from Traffick911 on the “Traps of a Trafficker.” This session is attended by Fort Bend ISD school counselors and administrators to encourage them to bring training to their schools.
- 7/21/14 Executive Director Deena Graves of Traffick911 met with representatives John Zerwas and Rick Miller who were very receptive to the work that Traffick911 is doing and asked Deena to let them know what they can do legislatively.
- 7/21/14 Traffick911 conducted another training session with the girls in juvenile custody on the “Traps of a Trafficker.”
- 7/21/14 Congressman Pete Olson held a Congressional Update on human trafficking and invited Judge Shoemake to be on the speaker panel. The panel included law enforcement, legislative and advocacy representatives. Several committee members attended and Connie Almeida substituted for Judge Shoemake on the panel. Congressman Olson supports several measures in the House to combat human trafficking.
- 7/22/14 Traffick911 conducted a training session for Child Advocates/CASA workers. Representatives from Katy and Lamar ISDs were in attendance.
- 7/21-22/14 Committee member attended a computer course on the use of social media as a tool for law enforcement. The Sheriff’s Office and Constable Pct. 3 have Facebook pages as a community outreach tool.



- 8/15/14 Traffick911 conducted a training session with FBISD administrators, counselors and nurses. Traffick911 is also scheduled to train Katy ISD and Lamar CISD at a future date.
- 10/4/14 Committee members attended a human trafficking symposium hosted by Lambda Sigma Chapter of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. Senator Huffman provided an update on the issue of unaccompanied minors coming across the U.S. borders. She reported that nearly 300,000 minors have come through five border checkpoints. The symposium also included an impressive roster of speakers including Elijah Rising, an advocacy and rescue group. The Committee began collecting information on agencies that provide advocacy, rescue, and rehabilitation services as potential resources.
- 10/7/14 *8 Days*, a feature film, premiered in Houston. The film chronicles the harrowing experience of a 16-year-old girl who is kidnapped from a party and sold for 8 days until rescued by law enforcement. The purpose of the film was to educate the public on human sex trafficking and encourage people to get involved to help bring an end to this horrific crime. There were two screens showing the film and it was well attended with the filmmakers and Traffick911 present.
- 10/16/14 Committee member attended the Community Forum on Human Trafficking with U.S. Rep. Ted Poe, Harris County Sheriff Adrian Garcia and Children at Risk President and CEO, Dr. Robert Sanborne. Sheriff Garcia extended an invitation for our committee to visit with his staff to discuss what Harris County is doing about human trafficking. The Committee will hold off on doing this until we have met with our Commissioners and Sheriff's Office staff.
- 10/22/14 Several members attended the congressional Interim Joint Legislative Committee on Human Trafficking Hearing held in Houston to hear testimony on the prosecution of human trafficking crimes and current resources available to victims. Testimony was also heard on Labor Trafficking issues. It was learned that while multiple agencies are providing resources for victims, getting arrests and convictions of traffickers is minimal.
- 10/29-30/14 The District Attorney's Office hosted a 2-day Crime Victims Response Team conference with an all-day track focusing on human trafficking reaching an audience of more than 150.
- 11/5/14 Committee member attended Children at Risk 2015 Texas Legislative Session to hear child advocates and policy experts discuss priorities and strategies for the upcoming 84<sup>th</sup> legislative session. Specific issue areas addressed include physical and behavioral health, public education, parenting education and human trafficking.

## **Fort Bend County Human Trafficking Task Force Goals for FY 2015**

Purpose: Evaluate Senate Bill 484 from the 83<sup>rd</sup> Legislature and determine implementation of the mandate to create a prostitution prevention program in Fort Bend County and seek appropriate grant funds.

### **A. Goals**

- Continue needs assessment to identify the problem –  
Community Awareness – continue Community outreach and plan for an educational awareness summit after completion of legislative session.
- Training to appropriately respond to the problem –  
Education and training for law enforcement – encourage a roll-call training program for identification and effective prosecution. Continue to work toward effective training for judicial and prosecution personnel.
- Develop resources to resolve the problem –  
Resources – develop financial and workforce resources of intervention, prevention and response services. Will continue to investigate existing resources and solicit support from key stakeholders to coordinate any budgetary request for the FY16 County Budget. Continue to seek available grants that may be available for personnel or special services.
- Legislate for the appropriate tools to address the problem –  
Legislation – coordinate changes to legislation by partnership with other advocacy groups. Seek support of Commissioners Court for proposed legislation. Monitor and watch pending legislative issues.
- Develop restitution and or rehabilitation to eradicate the problem –  
Respond – develop intra-agency and key stakeholder relationships to explore successful prevention activities and develop partnerships to consolidate prevention and rehabilitation services.
- Report Finds –  
Reporting – prepare a second annual report on findings, achievements and goals for Commissioner Court at the end of FY15.

- B. HTTF request Commissioners Court support for the following proposed activities:
- Continuation of the committee created under SB 484 under the new name - Human Trafficking Task Force
  - Adoption of Resolution supporting the proposed legislation for the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session
  - Funding to hold a subsequent public summit after legislation is enacted to further community awareness and continuing education (request placed in FY16 budget)
  - Coordination with other county departments on specific budget request for additional resources for the FY16 budget.
  - Develop plan to implement any mandates from new legislation for presentation to the Commissioners Court for action as needed
  - Support applications for grant resources

**SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE FORT BEND COUNTY  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE FOR THE 84<sup>TH</sup> TEXAS LEGISLATIVE  
SESSION**

**I. Reducing Demand on a State Level through Tougher Criminal Laws**

A. The Task Force recommends strengthening Texas criminal laws in order to prosecute more human trafficking buyers and ultimately decrease the demand for human trafficking by providing sufficient penalties to deter buyers from purchasing children for sex. Suggestions include increasing offense charges and allowing for the introduction of prior relationship evidence in human trafficking prosecution cases.

B. Reasoning:

1. Buyers are rarely being prosecuted, and, if they are, penalties are minimal.

2. The Protective Order Enforcement Statute for trafficking (as well as sexual assault and stalking) only allows for punishment as a class A misdemeanor although the predicate offense is a felony. Nor does the current statute allow for the elevation of the offense for repeat and/or continuous offenders.

3. Increasing offense charges and conditions for bond approval will help to decrease criminal activity and reduce the number of human trafficking crimes committed.

**II. Increasing the Age a Child May Be Charged With Prostitution**

A. The Task Force recommends amending the Texas Penal Code to specifically state that prostitution crimes do not apply to minors up to the age of 18 years old.

B. Reasoning:

1. Juveniles are being charged as criminals when they are actually victims.

2. More emphasis is needed on treatment and restoration for these victims rather than the stigma and repercussions of having a crime of moral turpitude on their records.

### **III. Expungement of Records for Minor Victims of Human Trafficking**

A. The Task Force recommends expungement of juvenile records for minors charged with prostitution. This is suggested as an alternative to increasing the age a child may be charged with this crime.

B. Reasoning:

1. Victims are severely hindered from reentering society and becoming productive citizens if they have criminal records which can hinder their future prospects including future employment and higher education opportunities. The crimes they have on their records that were “incident” to being trafficked should be expunged or at the minimum sealed.

2. If they are not able to get further education or secure gainful employment, they are more likely to return to those who engage in abusive and criminal behavior.

### **IV. Additional Counseling Services for Runaways Who May Be Targeted as Potential Victims**

A. The Task Force suggests lengthening the time that an at-risk or runaway juvenile can be detained from 24 hours to up to 15 days. Currently, the law allows these runaways to remain in juvenile detention for 24 hours. It is recommended that the juvenile court have the ability to hold juveniles suspected of being victims of trafficking in an appropriate facility or holding area for a longer period of time to enable the response team to gather necessary information, screen the child, and search for available and appropriate services while detained.

B. Reasoning:

Non-profit organizations such as Traffick911 have consulted with law enforcement, juvenile justice and other agencies and have determined that the 24-hour detainment of at-risk/runaway juveniles is not sufficient to afford them proper screening, services, and protection.

### **V. Increase Victim Counseling and Training Services for Law Enforcement**

A. FBC HTTF recommends training for law enforcement including proper victim identification where human trafficking may be involved.

B. Reasoning:

1. As first responders, law enforcement are often the first to come across human trafficking cases, and equipping them with the knowledge and tools to address human trafficking will result in more victims being identified and more perpetrators being arrested.
2. By mandating training, whether through annual continuing in-service training or through basic training at the academies, law enforcement will gain the skills to adequately investigate cases and appropriately interact with victims of human trafficking. Moreover, training prosecutors on human trafficking will allow for more effective prosecutions in which perpetrators will get stiffer criminal penalties for the heinous crimes they commit.
3. Training should focus on:
  - a) Methods used in identifying victims of trafficking in persons, including preliminary interview techniques and appropriate questioning methods;
  - b) Methods of increasing effective collaboration with non-governmental organizations and other relevant social service organizations in the course of investigating and prosecuting a trafficking case;
  - c) Methods for protecting the rights of victims, taking into account the need to consider human rights and the special needs of women and minors, and the stigmatization and negative effects of labeling victims as criminals; and
  - d) Methods for promoting the safety of victims.

## **VI. Mandated Training for Judges, Licensed Attorneys, CPS, Juvenile Justice and Child Advocates Where Human Trafficking May Be Involved**

- A. FBC HTTF recommends mandating domestic human trafficking training for licensed attorneys, judges, CPS employees, CPS contract providers (CPS placements, group homes, foster homes), juvenile justice officials, and child advocates.
- B. Reasoning:
  1. As a result of a lack of training in regards to understanding cases of sex trafficking, children are re-victimized as they are sent through the judicial system. They are often treated and convicted as criminals without being identified as possible victims of human trafficking.
  2. Training focus should be similar to those suggested above for law enforcement.