



Prepared Written Testimony and Statement

of

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before

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism

Hearing Entitled

“Tackling Human Trafficking: Assessing Federal, State and Local Information Sharing Efforts”

October 28, 2019

Old County Courthouse, Greensboro, NC



Good morning, Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this critically important topic. It is an honor to speak on behalf of the many dedicated professionals appointed to the North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission. I currently serve as the Executive Director, and only staff, for the Commission. Our Commission was created by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2012 and was reconfigured in 2013 during the passage of our Safe Harbor Law. Regular meetings, as a permanent Commission, began in March of 2014.

The Commission consists of twelve appointed members and three ex-officio judicial seats. Of the twelve voting members, four are appointed by the Governor, four by the NC Speaker of the House of Representatives, and four by the NC President Pro Tempore of the Senate. The statutory charge of the Commission is as follows:

1. To apply for and receive funding, on behalf of the State, that will assist in examining and countering the problem of human trafficking in North Carolina;
2. To commission, fund, and facilitate quantitative and qualitative research to explore the specific ways human trafficking is occurring in North Carolina and to assist in creating measurement, assessment, and accountability mechanisms;
3. To contribute to efforts to inform and educate law enforcement personnel, social services providers, and the general public about human trafficking so that traffickers can be prosecuted and victim-survivors can receive appropriate services;
4. To suggest new policies, procedures, or legislation to further the work of eradicating human trafficking and to provide assistance and review with new policies, procedures, and legislation;
5. To assist in developing regional response teams or other coordinated efforts to counter human trafficking at the level of law enforcement, legal services, social services, and nonprofits; and
6. To identify gaps in law enforcement or service provision and recommend solutions.

Since 2014, the Commission has participated in several state, regional, and national roundtables, advisory committees, studies, collaboratives, and compendiums.

Throughout the past four years, the Commission has invited regional response programs and other providers from the mountains to the coast to share trends they are seeing, as well as their program strengths and needs. These experts, and many others, have given us tremendous insight into gaps across the state and ways to address the gaps. Additionally, state and national experts, as well as survivors, have provided key information regarding advice for potential policy changes or emerging practices in the field.



Informed by these stakeholders, the Human Trafficking Commission has launched efforts, partnerships, and projects to make steps towards fulfilling our statutory charge.

Some examples of Commission successes are listed below:

- Establishment of mandatory law enforcement training.
- Conducting statewide multidisciplinary symposiums annually the past three years. The conferences have featured different tracks for professionals across the state using both national speakers and state content experts.
- Distribution of \$1.35 million in direct service grants through a state appropriation. These grants are helping launch and expand the provision of services and response across the state.
- Issuing Standards for Direct Service Providers to use when working with survivors.
- Mandatory posting of an awareness poster in over 19,000 locations across the state.
- Multiple legislative actions to strengthen child sexual exploitation laws, create a civil remedy for victims, create a sex tourism law, and expand post-conviction relief for victims charged with a crime while being trafficked.

Although colleagues beside me today will add much more detail regarding the trends being seen across North Carolina, I can tell you that our state continues to see cases of both sex and labor trafficking crossing all demographic lines. According to reports from the National Human Trafficking Hotline, our state has consistently ranked within the top ten states for human trafficking. Stories from steadfast providers in the field continue to indicate numerous industries in which cases are being identified and the opioid epidemic continues to further complicate case management and outreach efforts.

While working in the field of anti-human trafficking can be exhausting, I can also speak to how inspirational it is to have dedicated law enforcement, service providers and community members working alongside each other daily. I would like to highlight two of the collaborations seen within the state. These examples include participants from federal, state and local levels working in tandem.

First, the process of drafting a statewide human trafficking resource directory has demonstrated there are roughly twenty-four multidisciplinary regional response programs, local task forces or local coalitions working across the state. These are groups of both government and non-profits that are either providing 24/7 response to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, are coordinating providers in order to ensure wrap around services for victims, or are strategically planning for action in specific areas of the movement in their communities. While the initial resource directory draft indicates roughly sixty non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the movement, one-third are agencies offering to help victims as part of another program that is not specific to human trafficking and therefore is tailored to another population, such as homelessness, domestic violence, etc.



A second partnership example is the North Carolina Coalition Against Human Trafficking (NCCAHT). In its original grassroots form, this organization consisted of committed advocates, law enforcement and service providers meeting regularly as an informal membership. These professionals initiated projects aimed at building awareness and response across the state. The collective impact model of NCCAHT was monumental in advocating for the establishment of the Human Trafficking Commission, and NCCAHT holds a seat on the Commission. Other statewide projects, research and grants have also included the Commission and NCCAHT as part of their advisory committees, which then continues to enhance collective impact at both macro and micro levels.

As you each know all too well, large issues such as this one are met with many obstacles. It seems prudent to share some of the challenges facing North Carolina.

One main challenge for statewide mobilization and action is funding. The Commission is currently staffed with a state appropriation that ends before the fiscal year closes. Not only does the Commission need recurring funding to continue progress towards its statutory charge, but our state desperately needs a funded task force to ensure cases are taken from initial identification, to proper and full victim service provision, and finally to prosecution of the trafficker. Furthermore, we believe it is critical that prevention efforts be prioritized for funding.

As with many states, another issue facing us is lack of appropriate, comprehensive services throughout the entire state. While we have a few NGOs operating with federal funding such as the Office of Victim's Crime grants or with state funding through Governor's Crime Commission grants, there are still gaps in service provision such as emergency and transitional housing. Expansion of such services and development of additional specialties, e.g., alternative therapies, is a critical piece in this puzzle.

Lastly, data collection is a discussion often brought up as a barrier to preparing adequately for future needs in capacity building, or as a barrier to obtaining funding. Since this is a hidden and complex crime, collecting reliable and unduplicated data from multiple sectors that are each coming into contact with victims is a difficult challenge.

In summation, human trafficking is sometimes referred to as a public health, social justice, human rights, and public safety issue. North Carolina recognizes that it will take everyone working together to end this horrific crime. It is vital that we continue these partnerships and collaborations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We appreciate your interest and I look forward to answering your questions and to future collaborations with members of the Subcommittee to address this urgent problem.