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

Good morning, Chairman Bennie Thompson, Ranking member Mike Rodgers and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the issues of Human Trafficking in North Carolina. It is an honor to speak on behalf of the dedicated professionals of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (NCSBI). My name is Carl Wall; I am the Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the NCSBI's Human Trafficking Unit. For more than twenty-six years I have had the honor of serving North Carolina as a law enforcement officer, the last twenty-one years as a Special Agent with the NCSBI. I have held many roles over my career as Drug Agent, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Task Force Officer, Assistant Special Agent in Charge, and Special Agent in Charge. I was previously the SAC of the SBI's Training Section before this assignment as the SAC of the Human Trafficking Unit.

In 2017, the North Carolina General Assembly gave the NCSBI original jurisdiction of human trafficking investigations. In 2018, the NCSBI began efforts to establish a unit to combat human trafficking in North Carolina. In July of that year I was assigned as the SAC of the Human Trafficking Unit. My goals were to provide training, both basic and advance to identify, support and rescue victims, and identify and bring to justice traffickers, and to coordinate with local and federal law enforcement. Currently, I am the NCSBI's only full-time human trafficking agent. The SBI has lobbied for more agents to the NC General Assembly. In our pending state budget, the General Assembly has designated funds for eight full time human trafficking agents. If our Governor signs the budget, we will have a full-time unit to serve the citizens of North Carolina.

When I began this position, I had no experience with or prior knowledge of human trafficking. I attended every training and conference I could find to learn what human trafficking looks like. I also learned from other agencies including the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation as to what their states do to combat human trafficking. Many of these agencies exceed North Carolina in resources allocated to combat trafficking, understanding of the crime and structure of response. Many have protocols and excellent working relationships between federal, state and local agencies to include Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to make human trafficking cases seamless in their investigation and response to victims.

In 2017, North Carolina was ranked by the National Human Trafficking hotline (Polaris Project) as being eighth in the nation for number of human trafficking tips reported. Polaris reported that NC had 221 reported tips, 149 of them sex related, and 51 labor related. In 2018 Polaris reported we had 287 tips, 192 of them related to sex trafficking and 54 related to labor trafficking, which ranked us tenth in the nation for reported tips. Although these reports may appear to be low, these are just the tips reported to Polaris, which were agreed upon to share with law enforcement. I have learned through active communication with a local service provider, A Safe Place in Wilmington, NC that they had reported serving over 190 victims in 2018. So, what is the accurate data? It is my belief that actual numbers are much higher than Polaris reports, and as a state we simply don't know the real number of victims in North Carolina. Our intelligence analyst, Ashley Burke, evaluated the number sex related advertisements on the internet specific to North Carolina. On just one website (Skip the Games) we discovered that in 2018 there were over 400,000 ads specific to North Carolina. (See Attachment #1)

It is evident that North Carolina, like other states, has a human trafficking issue and law enforcement is behind in effectively combatting it. To date, the Fayetteville Police Department is the only agency that has a full-time Human Trafficking Unit. They have four full-time officers working human trafficking cases and have been extremely successful. North Carolina is unique, as we are still educating officers, chiefs, and sheriffs that human trafficking exists and it's our mission at the NCSBI to educate and assist them with conducting investigations and rescuing victims. At a recent Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) roundtable, I explained that not everyone in North Carolina recognizes human trafficking and that the victims are truly victims and not suspects in a prostitution case. I have found the best way to relate to the local law enforcement's misunderstanding of human trafficking is to explain to them from my point of view as a previous drug investigator. Traffickers are like drug dealers, they are business people. Rather than selling narcotics, their commodity is another human being. Sadly, people are a commodity that they don't have to replenish; their "product" doesn't go away when they sell it. They can profit over and over.

During classes that we teach all over the state we make sure to show that human trafficking is not just in the most populated areas, as some assume, but everywhere. Attached as attachment #2 (See attachment #2) is a map of the state of North Carolina and how many ads are specific to each selected city. Even the rural communities in North Carolina are not immune from these heinous crimes. When I hear someone say, "the victim could leave or run anytime they want. They're not a victim," I explain, I have never heard a victim say, "I chose to be a prostitute when I grow up." It doesn't happen. They are victims, controlled by force, fraud, or coercion from the traffickers. Over the past 15 months the NCSBI has conducted over 20 trainings covering 15 counties, with more scheduled. In the 15 months the NCSBI has gone from conducting approximately 18 human trafficking investigations to having opened 61 cases to date. We have over 14 NCSBI Agents who volunteer to have a collateral duty of investigating human trafficking investigations. This comes a secondary duty, only after their original assignment is complete, which comes first.

As the NCSBI moves forward in establishing a fulltime Human Trafficking Unit we continue to train, educate and conduct proactive investigations. We do this with collaboration and partnerships with local and federal agencies. In the past 15 months the NCSBI has conducted 10 proactive operations in which we have encountered 45 victims of human trafficking. With our partnerships and collaboration, we have been able to offer these victims services to get them out of their current situation, and we have identified and began to investigate traffickers to bring them to justice. Partnership and collaboration is the only way you can investigate this crime. It is like no other; we in law enforcement must work together and with the NGO's to conduct a successful investigation. It is one of the only crimes that law enforcement needs and relies on others for a successful case. When the NCSBI began this unit in 2018 the first thing I did was personally go and visit federal agency leaders in each Area of Responsibility (AOR). I met with each RAC of Homeland Security Investigations office and explained what the NCSBI's mission was and what our goals are. Each office has been more than helpful in assisting the NCSBI's mission. I also met with and described our mission to each RAC of

the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) offices in North Carolina. They too have been very supportive and inclusive. Both federal agencies have been imperative in the creation and success of the NCSBI's mission.

In each of our Human Trafficking outreach operations and in most of our investigations there has been a positive interaction with federal and local law enforcement. We are here to support each other, with the same goal of supporting victims and helping them get out of "the life" and bring justice to the traffickers. This partnership is key, we must all share our data and information because the traffickers know no boundaries. We must work hand in hand with our NGO partners and make sure to include them as we move forward in this effort to end Human Trafficking. On average, it takes six encounters with law enforcement and NGO's to get a victim to understand that their normal is not normal and show them a better way of life without a trafficker. So, we all must work vigilantly and continuously together to make a difference in North Carolina.

As we move forward with a full time Human Trafficking unit for the NCSBI, I am proud to lead the charge from our agency. I am proud to have partners such as HSI and FBI and our local law enforcement as we tackle this hideous crime. In my twenty-six plus years in law enforcement I have seen many gruesome crimes. I have dealt with murderers, rapists, and ruthless narcotic organizations. Until this assignment, I had never seen the violence, both physical and mental, the sickness and the controlling that a trafficker has over a victim. A victim that is another human being, a victim that has the potential to be successful, proactive person to society and their humanity taken away by someone else. The crime of human trafficking has always existed in some form. We must turn the lens of our views as to what it is, where it is, and how we go about changing it. No longer should we look at these individuals as "choosing" to sell themselves for sex, they are victims of human trafficking.

In closing, I am proud to be the one who hopefully can make a change in Human Trafficking in North Carolina. I hope in my final years as a law enforcement officer we can see the success that the NCSBI and all partners hope for. I hope to have a full-time unit that makes a huge impact on this crime. Our number of reported victims will rise, we want them to rise to show the serious issue we have. If the numbers rise, then we know the public, law enforcement, and everyone is seeing this crime for what it really is and not ignoring or misidentifying it.

Thank you to the members of this committee for allowing me to testify here today.

## Total Ads in North Carolina By Website 2018

- ▶ Backpage: 173,000 (Shut Down in April)
- ▶ Callescort: 1,600
- ▶ Cityvibe: 423
- ▶ Nightshift: 129
- ▶ Adult Look: 12,600
- ▶ Adult Search: 576
- ▶ CityxGuide: 33,100
- ▶ Onebackpage: 6,500
- ▶ Skip The Games: 400,100
- ▶ Mega Personals: 103,500

# Regions and Larger Cities in North Carolina



