

Testimony of Terry FitzPatrick
Director of the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST)
Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border Security and Enforcement
U.S. House of Representatives
November 13, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today. My name is Terry FitzPatrick. I direct the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST). We are a nonpartisan coalition of organizations that conduct programs in more than 30 U.S. cities and 100 countries. ATEST advocates for stronger federal laws and increased federal funding to prevent and combat forced labor and human trafficking.

I think the most important takeaway from my comments today will be this: whole-of-government solutions are needed to defeat trafficking. I'd like to articulate what that should look like regarding migration. I have three issue areas to discuss, and three recommendations.

Issue One: Some Context

Not all forced labor and human trafficking is related to migration. The United Nations estimates that 15 percent of victims throughout the world today are migrants. That's 4 million people worldwide. Unfortunately, there are no authoritative trafficking statistics for the U.S. The National Institute of Justice is currently conducting research.

But it is known that migration-related trafficking reaches beyond undocumented individuals. For example, the National Human Trafficking Hotline has received thousands of calls for help from migrants inside the U.S. legally on guestworker visas or already in asylee protected status.

Lastly, it's American businesses who ultimately profit from transnational human trafficking. American farms and factories exploit migrant children in illegal child labor. Migrant adults trapped in illegal debt bondage are generating profits for American corporations.

Issue Two: The Need for Prevention and Protection

Law enforcement isn't the only solution. Foreign assistance programs can help reduce the number of individuals leaving their home countries. Increasing the capacity to properly process migrants can reduce trafficking vulnerability. That's because long delays at legal points of entry can cause desperate individuals to become trafficking targets. There's an urgent need at the U.S. border for more asylum officers, immigration judges, child welfare specialists, and attorneys.

As well, to protect migrants already here, there needs to be increased workplace inspections by the Labor Department, and reform of guestworker visa rules.

Issue Three: The Protection of American Values and Leadership

Migrants not only seek economic opportunity in the United States; they seek safety and freedom. Our answer to those fleeing forced labor and human trafficking abroad must not be to go back.

Congress has ensured that the United States, perhaps more than any other country, embraces a whole-of-government vision for counter-trafficking programs. However, particularly along the border, our nation is not living up to that holistic ideal.

Quickly, Three Recommendations:

Recommendation One: Pass the Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act, the TVPRA. To improve international trafficking prevention, H.R. 5856 will require the integration of anti-trafficking strategies into programs at the U.S. Agency for International Development. To protect trafficking survivors in the U.S., the bill reauthorizes programs at the Department of Health and Human Services. We also urge passage of a companion Senate bill, S. 920, with additional provisions to protect migrants and reauthorization of State Department anti-trafficking programs.

Recommendation Two: Enact key provisions of the FY24 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Request. The Border Supplemental section includes additional asylum officers and immigration judges, increased social services, and tougher enforcement of U.S. child labor law. As well, hold the line on trafficking funding throughout the federal budget. With all the public attention this issue is receiving at movie theatres and in the news media, the response from Congress must not be to slash support.

Recommendation Three: Do not rollback protections for unaccompanied child migrants. All children deserve screening by specially-trained border personnel. Congress has specifically required this safeguard for children from Central America. However, H.R. 2, the Secure the Border Act, would strip this protection in favor of expedited review by lesser-trained staff. H.R. 2 has already passed the House; but I urge you to oppose efforts to attach it to appropriations bills or other legislation.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to answering any questions that you have now or at any time in the future.

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