



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
Hidden in Plain Sight: Understanding Federal Efforts to Stop
Human Trafficking

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

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According to U.S. federal estimates, at any given moment there are 25 million people around the world being trafficked, and Polaris estimates this number could be as high as 40 million people.

These victims have been stripped of their freedom and are being forced or coerced into performing labor or commercial sex acts. And these victims could be anyone, all ages, all races, socioeconomic backgrounds, male, female, foreigners, or U.S. citizens.

A victim could be from any country, state or city, because human trafficking exists everywhere. It exists throughout the United States, in both cities and rural areas, in our own communities and congressional districts, even though it may not be visible to those who are not trained to detect it.

One thing everyone seems to agree on is that certain factors can make people more susceptible to being victimized by a trafficker.

Being a youth, recent migration or relocation, substance abuse, mental health issues, being a runaway or homeless, or involvement with the child welfare system — these risk factors are often associated with people who are or have been trafficked.

Traffickers take advantage of these vulnerabilities to control and exploit their victims.

I was interested to read the testimony of one of our witnesses today, Chief Justice Demmert, because it pointed to an extremely high incidence of trafficking among the American Indian and Alaska Native populations. She cites a 2016 report from The National Institute for Justice that found that 84% of American Indian and Alaska Native women will experience intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking in their lifetime, and one in three have experienced it in the past year.

This is an extraordinarily high rate of violence focused on a specific population. Knowing this, particularly as members of Congress, we have a duty to ask ourselves what we are going to do to address this problem. While statistics are part of the story, it does nothing to convey the impact of this violence.

I look forward to hearing from Chief Justice Demmert today, to better understand the totality of circumstances facing our native peoples and to hear her comments and recommendations on how we can begin to tackle this problem.

Many of our federal departments work together to around the world to combat human trafficking, some of whom are represented here today.

Each partner plays an important role in a unified effort to combat trafficking. From obtaining and sharing information, identifying and supporting victims, building investigations and cases against perpetrators and networks, and shutting down opportunities for traffickers to exploit more victims.

I also hope to hear from our federal witnesses about how they work with their state, local, tribal, private sector, and other non-governmental partners.

Growing our understanding of how these criminal enterprises operate, who their victims are, and how we can all better work together is integral to rooting out these operations and ending the enslavement of millions of people.

I look forward to hearing about some of the coordinated work being accomplished today and what kind of resources or support is needed to further identify and eradicate the stain of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a detestable crime and Congress must do its part to provide the tools that are necessary to bring these crimes out of the shadows where trafficking thrives.

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