State Human Trafficking News

The following is a compendium of news reports over the last month that may be of interest to our AG offices who are dealing with human trafficking issues. Neither the National Association of Attorneys General nor the National Attorneys General Training & Research Institute expresses a view as to the accuracy of news accounts, nor as to the position expounded by the authors of the hyperlinked articles.

News from AG Offices

Arkansas Attorney General Dustin McDaniel announced that he has established a statewide task force to focus on preventing human trafficking and raising awareness about the issue in the state. The task force is composed of law enforcement officials, state agency representatives, community leaders, and victims’ rights advocates. The first meeting was on November 19.

Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt announced that the Kansas Human Trafficking Advisory Board met for the first time the end of October. The board discussed the implementation of the state’s new anti-human trafficking law.

Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette announced the release of the report written by the Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking.

Federal Legislative Activity

Several pieces of human trafficking legislation are being considered by Congress. HR 3344, the Fraudulent Overseas Recruitment and Trafficking Elimination Act, would impose requirements in foreign labor recruitment in order to create greater transparency for would-be recruits. HR 2805 and S.1354, the End Sex Trafficking Act of 2013, would add federal enforcement powers against the customers of child sex trafficking victims. A third bill, Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, S. 1738 and HR 3530, sets out parameters for grants for human trafficking training for law enforcement and for assisting victims of human trafficking and also eases the requirements for bringing a federal RICO charge in a human trafficking case.

State/Local Legislative Activity

A law that recently took effect in Oklahoma gives the Oklahoma Bureau of narcotics agency subpoena power for cases involving human trafficking.

Wisconsin legislators are considering several bills. AB 524 would expunge a record of a conviction or adjudication of delinquency if the offender was a victim of human trafficking. AB 495 would remove from Wisconsin’s definition of “trafficking” the requirement that the individual be recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided, or obtained without his or her consent.
A Fresno, California, Councilmember announced plans to propose an ordinance that would provide high penalties for massage parlors that provide sexual services. The number of massage parlors in Fresno has jumped from 30 to 200 in the past five years. Another proposal would be to restrict the hours of operation of massage parlors and make it illegal to advertise sexual material.

**State Investigations/Arrests**

San Mateo, California, sheriff’s office announced that they had arrested two individuals on various charges, including human trafficking.

Shon Tinsley, on parole for burglary, was arrested on suspicion of human trafficking, pimping, and pandering in Redwood City, California.

A Houston, Texas, man, Sael Williams, was recently arrested in Ft. Myers, Florida, on human trafficking charges. Investigators say that Williams forced a female victim, who had tried to escape several times, to engage in prostitution by advertising her services online.

In Boise, Idaho, Derrick Hicklen and Gypsie Lee Akers have been indicted by a grand jury for human trafficking, procurement and receiving pay for procurement of prostitution, and compelling another to engage in prostitution. Investigators have located several victims of the couple and are searching for more.

Prosecutors in Cook County, Illinois, have charged landlord Roy Esteviz Jr. of aggravated involuntary servitude, involuntary servitude, and aggravated criminal sexual assault. This is the first Cook County charge under the state’s labor trafficking laws. Esteviz is accused of using torture, including inflicting burns with a heated butcher’s knife, along with beatings and threats to keep two tenants, who were reportedly mentally challenged, working several jobs while he kept all their earnings.

Garden City, Kansas, police responded to a report from the Kansas Department for Children and Families regarding the possible rape of a 13-year-old girl who may also have been involved in human trafficking. According to police, two individuals, Marie Castro and Tomas Ramos, paid $8,000 to bring the girl to the United States from Guatemala and required her to work to pay off the debt. They are then accused of selling her to Jose Saban who allegedly impregnated her.

Prosecutors in Wichita, Kansas, charged Chivas Taylor with aggravated human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of a 16-year-old.

Terry Higgs of Brownsville, Kentucky, has been indicted on human trafficking charges and related felonies. The charges involve the alleged trafficking of a 16-year-old minor.

In a suspected labor trafficking case, Lexington, Kentucky, police arrested owners of several Subway restaurants. A witness provided information that Amrutial Patel and his wife Dakshaben Patel and others were forcing four undocumented Indian citizens to work. A three-month investigation elicited further information which led to the arrest.
The Boise City, Louisiana, police arrested two individuals, Qualym Mitchell and Erica Campbell, on human trafficking charges. They allegedly brought a 16-year old to Louisiana from Dallas, Texas, to engage in prostitution.

A Michigan man and woman have been charged with human trafficking after allegedly advertising the sexual services of two victims under the age of 18. Marriott Hotel employees notified Cambridge, Massachusetts, police of suspicious activity. A subsequent investigation led to the arrests.

Tulsa, Oklahoma, police recently jailed a 39-year old man, Damien Wardell, on complaints of human trafficking and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Two juveniles, a male and a female, were found in the hotel room where Wardell was arrested.

A half million dollar bond has been set for a Milwaukee man, Thomas Roberts, arrested in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and charged with human trafficking of a minor and a 24-year old woman.

After receiving a call on Tennessee’s human trafficking hotline, Nashville, Tennessee, police investigated and then arrested a Milwaukee man on human trafficking charges.

Investigators with the Special Investigations Unit and Fugitive Unit of the Texas Attorney General’s Office arrested a 33-year old man, Miguel Hernandez, in Austin. Hernandez was wanted in connection with a human trafficking case in Hays County, Texas. He is accused, along with another man, Joe Cisneros, of holding a 15-year old for three weeks and prostituting her to more than 10 men.

**State Prosecutions**

A Montgomery County, Maryland, mother was convicted of two counts of human trafficking of a minor and rape in the second-degree. The conviction stemmed for her prostituting her daughter to a man to whom she owed money. The man, Benjarni Rivas, was also found guilty in absentia.

A Cleveland, Ohio, man, Bennie Veasey, was sentenced in Baltimore, County, Maryland, to 20 years on his conviction on three counts of human trafficking and one count of prostitution. He brought a 19-year old to Maryland and forced her to work as a prostitute to help pay legal bills stemming from rape charges in Cleveland.

In Port Orchard, Washington, Kitsap County prosecutors won their first human trafficking case. Anthony Parker faces at least 25 years in prison when he is sentenced in January. He was found guilty of 11 felony crimes related to the beating, prostituting and controlling of a woman whose services were advertised on the Internet.

**Articles of General Interest**

The Polaris Project recently released its report analyzing five years of statistics from calls made to the national human trafficking hotline. More than 42% of sex trafficking cases referenced pimp-controlled prostitution. Most frequently, callers reported that pimps had recruited their victims in social settings
by showing romantic interest and later forced them to provide commercial sex. More than 27% of labor trafficking cases referenced domestic work.

The Cook County, Illinois, trafficking task force has been expanded to include a labor group that meets separately to talk about how to combat that form of human trafficking.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced an alliance with Western Union to combat human trafficking. Through the alliance, Western Union will provide the DHS’ Blue Campaign training to select agent locations across the country.

The Minneapolis, Minnesota, Star Tribune ran a four-part series called “Saving Bobbi.” It is the story of a young human trafficking victim and her struggle to exit the life after being rescued by an experienced and dedicated Minneapolis human trafficking investigator, Sgt. Grant Snyder.

An Omaha, Nebraska, newspaper published an article noting that truckers are assisting law enforcement with finding victims of human trafficking and noting that children are bought and sold along I-80 in that state.

New York’s State Bar Association issued a report calling for changes to curb human trafficking. Among its recommendations is that sex trafficking should be classified as a Class B violent felony and that the age of criminal responsibility should be raised to age 18.

Nevada has created a fund to combat human trafficking in the state. Created by AB 311, the fund will be used to establish or provide programs or services to help human trafficking victims.

An article in a Tennessee newspaper highlighted the training that Vision Hospitality is conducting for its employees to prevent, recognize, and combat human trafficking. Vision Hospitality is the parent company for hotels such as Hilton, Hyatt, and Doubletree.

In an unusual partnership, the City of Houston, Texas, has reached a settlement with a sixteen strip clubs suspending enforcement of certain regulations with the clubs which, in exchange, have agreed to eliminate private rooms, train employees of human trafficking awareness, and report all complaints of prostitution, indecent exposure, and drug use to police. The clubs also agreed to donate $1 million annually to help combat human trafficking. The money will fund a newly-created Houston Police Department unit dedicated solely to investigating human trafficking.

Officials recently announced the formation of a federal, state, and local task force that aims to address human trafficking in the western part of Virginia. One of the group’s main goals is to arm frontline police officers with the training to recognize signs of sex and labor trafficking.