The following is a compendium of news reports over the last month that may be of interest to our AG offices that are dealing with state-focused 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.

April 2015

News from AG Offices

**Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi** announced the arrest of 15 suspects after an investigation revealed a human trafficking network involving multiple victims operating from Central to South Florida. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement’s Ft. Myers Regional Operations Center led the investigation in conjunction with the Collier County Sheriff’s Office and The Attorney General’s Office of Statewide Prosecution.

In anticipation of Indianapolis’ hosting the NCAA Final Four tournament and as a part of its commitment to address human trafficking, **Indiana General Greg Zoeller’s** office has partnered with members of the Outdoor Advertising Association, Clear Channel, Polaris, Restored, and local, state, and federal law enforcement to put up 35 billboards across the state. These billboards will be in both Spanish and English and will feature the National Human Trafficking Hotline number. They will run through the week of the NCAA Final Four.

**Nebraska Attorney General Doug Petersen** testified before the Judiciary Committee of the state legislature in favor of LB294, which would strengthen the state’s laws against sex trafficking. The bill would increase penalties against traffickers, allow for forfeiture of their assets for the purpose of funding services for victims, and allow juvenile courts to ensure that victims of trafficking actually receive services.

Court Cases

Eleven Filipino workers have filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court against L’Amande French Bakery. They allege that they were forced to work over thirteen hours a day, paid less than $400 a month, and were told by the owners that they owed $11,000 for their transportation costs. They were unable to seek other employment in this country because they were brought over on visas that were tied to their employers. They are now seeking visas that are afforded to human trafficking victims.
**Federal Legislative Activity**

**SB 656** was introduced early last month. It would amend the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to enable state child protective services systems to improve the identification and assessment of child victims of sex trafficking.

The Senate has received **HR 460**. This bill, if passed, would require the Secretary of Homeland Security to train its personnel how to effectively deter, detect, disrupt, and prevent human trafficking while performing their official duties.

**State Legislative Activity**

The **Hawaii** House is considering a bill, **SB 265**, that would ban sex trafficking, require the treatment of those forced into prostitution as victims, not criminals, and enable prosecutors to use wiretapping in investigating such crimes. The bill has generated a split among the islands' top prosecutors. While those in Kauai and Hawaii support the bill, the chief prosecutor in Oahu is concerned that passage is going to make it more difficult to prosecute pimps. The bill has already passed the Senate.

The **Idaho Senate** had passed **SB 1154**. This would amend current law to allow a human trafficking victim to expunge a criminal history record for those crimes that were a result of the trafficking. **HB 183** has been introduced in the House. It would allow nonprofits to post sex trafficking awareness signs at Idaho rest stops.

In **Indiana**, the legislature passed a safe harbor bill, **HB 1216**, which will ensure that a person younger than 18 will not be prosecuted for prostitution if he or she is a victim of human trafficking. It also requires the superintendent of the State Police to create a pamphlet to be distributed by law enforcement when a child is reported missing. It awaits the Governor's signature. **SB 532** has passed both houses and has been sent back to the Senate with amendments. It includes adding human trafficking to the list of crimes considered to be indecent nuisances and allows property used to commit human trafficking to be subject to the Asset Forfeiture statute.

The **Missouri** House has passed **HB 152**, which would add the advertising of sexual acts with a minor to the state's law against sexual trafficking.

**New York** Governor Andrew Cuomo has indicated that he will sign **A00506**, the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act, which recently passed the New York legislature. It establishes two new crimes, aggravated labor trafficking and aggravated patronizing a minor for prostitution. Among its provisions is one that gives a trafficking victim an affirmative defense to a prostitution charges.

In **Rhode Island**, the House is considering **HR 5070**, which would increase jail time for convicted sexual predators from 40 to 50 years and the fine from $20,000 to $40,000. A similar measure, **S 0173** is before the Senate Judiciary Committee.
The South Carolina legislature has passed legislation that gives the state grand jury the power to investigate and indict those suspected of forcing people to have sex for money. Investigators and prosecutors say the law is important because traffickers often move around, making it difficult for any one law enforcement agency to pin them down. Attorney General Alan Wilson has been an advocate for passage of the bill.

The first measure passed by the Texas House this legislative session passed unanimously. HB 10 would make it easier to prosecute those who force minors into prostitution and it would establish a state anti-sex trafficking unit. Four new bills have been filed in the Texas legislature that, according to their sponsor, would assist in combating human trafficking. HB 2319 would raise penalties for those who solicit prostitution. HB 2291 aims to increase the penalties facing persons with multiple convictions of possession of child pornography. HB 2290 would designate January as Human Trafficking Prevention Month in Texas and HB 2286 would provide an avenue for victims of human trafficking to overturn prostitution convictions that were a result of their victimization.

Virginia has enacted its first standalone sex trafficking law. Governor Terry McAuliffe signed HB 1964 into law late last month. The bill creates new felonies for trafficking of persons for commercial sexual activity with an increased penalty if the trafficking is done by an adult and the person solicited is a minor. It also becomes a predicate crime for the application of Virginia’s racketeering act.

Three Washington State bills that aim to increase awareness of human trafficking and help agencies coordinate efforts to address the issue are being considered by the legislature. SB 5883 would require anti-human trafficking information to be posted in public restrooms. The cost would be covered by non-profit organizations. SB 5884 would create a website, run by the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy, that would gather information on anti-trafficking efforts around the state. SB 5994 directs the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy to establish a training program for criminal justice staff who investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate human trafficking crimes.

State Investigations/Arrests/Prosecutions

Alaska

Mar. 27, 2015: In Anchorage, Amber Batts has pled guilty to a reduced charge of second degree sex trafficking. She admitted to sending sex workers to Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, and the Mat-Su Valley. Her husband, Quinn Batts, also pled guilty to a reduced sex trafficking charge. He has been sentenced to five years’ probation and a suspended two-year sentence. His wife will be sentenced in July, according to Assistant Attorney General Adam Alexander.

Mar. 13, 2015: After a lengthy investigation by the Alaska Bureau of Investigation’s Special Crimes Investigations Unit, two still at-large suspects, Troy Williams and Heidi Ross, have been indicted for allegedly operating a prostitution ring in Anchorage. The women were allegedly threatened and beaten if they seemed reluctant to engage in prostitution.
Arkansas

**Mar. 28, 2015:** A former University of Arkansas basketball player, Jason Henry, was arrested on trafficking charges in connection with the sexual assault of and prostitution of a 14-year old girl. Fayetteville police also arrested a woman, Jessyca Hoskins, who evidently introduced the child to Henry. She allegedly filmed a sexual encounter between the two, knowing that the victim was underage.

California

**Mar. 27, 2015:** Santa Clara Valley deputies arrested the owner of Tandoori Grill on charges of involuntary servitude and human trafficking. They acted on an email tip they received that alleged that Pardeep Kumar had forced a restaurant owner to cook without pay for three years. The Los Angeles County Attorney's Office declined prosecution, determining that there was insufficient evidence to bring the case.

**Mar. 25, 2015:** The San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office announced the sentencing of Huey Reliford, 22, to 14 years and 8 months in state prison after a jury found him guilty of two counts of human trafficking of a minor for a sex act, three counts of pimping a minor, and two counts of pandering by procuring a minor. The prosecution was successful despite the victims having testified that the defendant did nothing wrong.

**Mar. 16, 2015:** The Fairfield Police Department and the FBI arrested Michael Anthony Holmes on charges of sex trafficking of children. He will be tried in federal court.

**Mar. 4, 2015:** The Orange County District Attorney’s office announced that Dominique Lewis was sentenced to ten years in prison after pleading guilty to one felony count of human trafficking of a minor, pimping a minor, and pimping an adult.

**Mar. 4, 2015:** The Orange County District Attorney also announced the conviction of Tavaris Daniels Mims on one felony count of human trafficking, pimping, pandering, aggravated assault, criminal threats, dissuading a witness by force or threat, and street terrorism. This is the first gang-related case brought by the district attorney’s Human Exploitation and Trafficking Unit.

**Mar. 2, 2015:** The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced that Robert James Spells faces charges of trafficking a minor for a sex act. Robert James Spells is alleged to have offered an 11-year-old for sex in February. Spells is also facing murder charges regarding the death of a transgender woman.

Colorado

**Mar. 24, 2015:** Christopher Sullivan, who had been accused in a crime spree including carjackings and burglaries, has pled guilty to 47 counts in Jefferson County Court. This includes the charges that he trafficked a 17-year old girl.
Florida

Mar. 27, 2015: A Gainesville accountant who was charged with multiple counts of human trafficking has pled to a charge of racketeering. Other charges were dropped because witnesses became uncooperative, according to State Attorney Bill Cervone. He was sentenced to 10 years probation.

Mar. 11, 2015: The Columbia County Sheriff's Office announced the arrest of James Harris, 20, for allegedly kidnapping a woman and holding her hostage as a sex slave. She managed to escape the house where she was being held and then flagged down a probation officer who was driving by.

Mar. 3, 2015: The Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office announced the arrest of two South Florida brothers on charges that they kidnapped and forced a 16-year old girl into prostitution.

Illinois

Mar. 6, 2015: Cook County Sheriff authorities have charged Ferid Mahalbasic with trafficking two young women, one 17 and the other 18. He is already charged with trafficking in another case and is being held without bond in jail. In the current case, he allegedly brought the two women from Iowa to Chicago in January where he posted ads featuring them on Backpage. When they indicated they wanted to leave, he allegedly assaulted and threatened them.

Maryland

Mar. 20, 2015: A former Temple University football star and Tampa Bay Buccaneers player, Matt Brown, has been arrested by Baltimore area undercover detectives. They responded to an advertisement on a webpage and met two men at a hotel who had three girls, aged 14, 16, and 17, that they were offering as prostitutes. Brown was arrested along with Anthony Ely Jr. and charged with human trafficking.

Minnesota

Mar. 20, 2015: The Duluth Police Department, with assistance from the Lake Superior Drug and Violent Crime Task Force and the Department of Homeland Security, launched a two-day operation that resulted in the arrest of 15 people on prostitution related charges.

Mar. 3, 2015: Ramsey County Attorney John Choi announced that five St. Paul area residents have been charged in connection with a multi-state sex trafficking ring that involved at least five different female victims. The investigation began when St. Paul police rescued a 17-year old that had been advertised on Backpage.
New Jersey

Mar. 15, 2015: Five New Jersey men have been indicted by the Cumberland County grand jury in connection with two slayings that authorities alleged were linked to a statewide human trafficking ring. One of the men who was killed was evidently operating a rival brothel; the other man worked for the ring.

New York

Mar. 27, 2015: Queens District Attorney Richard Brown announced that Jason Owens and Chatara Dacosta have pled guilty to sex trafficking after admitting they forced a 15-year old girl into prostitution.

Mar. 9, 2015: Gates police have arrested a 46-year old man, Michael Mangione, for having sex with a girl younger than 17. He was arrested as part of the police investigation into sex trafficking.

North Carolina

Mar. 30, 2015: Detectives with the Fayetteville Police Department identified Charles Edward McRae II of Hope Mills as a suspect in connection with a human trafficking investigation. U.S. Marshalls arrested him and he has been charged with trafficking of a minor.

Mar. 27, 2015: Greenville police arrested Derrick Whitehurst and charged him with two counts of human trafficking. Police believe that he took victims to various hotels and motels both in Greenville and along the east coast.

Mar. 20, 2015: A woman who escaped from the basement of her captor’s home and ran to a gate at Ft. Bragg led police to the house where she had been held. There, Spring Lake officers found two other women also living in the basement of the house. The accuser said that Robin Applewhite, 38, had picked her up in Fayetteville and taken her to hotels in Charlotte and Raleigh, forcing her to perform sexual acts for money.

Mar. 7, 2015: Twenty-five year old Wayne McKoy was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison for prostituting a minor child. In a separate incident, the Cumberland County Sheriff’s Office arrested six men, including two soldiers from Ft. Bragg, on charges of prostituting minors.

Ohio

Mar. 23, 2015: An Ohio mother has been indicted on charges she trafficked her 11-year old daughter to obtain heroin. The mother has been indicted on 27 counts including human trafficking and endangering children. Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters said that the accused would take her daughter to 41-year old Shandell Willingham in exchange for drugs. Willingham has also been indicted. The child is now staying with her father and stepmother. Her mother has pled not guilty.
Mar. 11, 2015: Derek Jamison, 32, of Zanseville was indicted on 46 counts, including multiple human trafficking charges. According to the indictment, he solicited four teen-aged girls, two of whom may have been developmentally disabled, to engage in sex for profit. He is being prosecuted by the Muskingum County Prosecutor’s Office.

North Dakota

Mar. 9, 2015: An undercover sting by law enforcement, including the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, in Williston has resulted in human trafficking charges against two men, Charles Norton and Rasheed Abdul Rahim. Undercover officers responded to ads posted on Backpage and arrested the men who had dropped the women off at local hotels.

Mar. 9, 2015: An officer from the North Dakota Highway Patrol pulled over a car driven by Kurtis William Johnson, from Wisconsin, for reported reckless driving. As a result of the stop, Johnson and one of his passengers were arrested for drug possession. During the course of the investigation, it was determined that Johnson was transporting two females to Bismarck to work as escorts. Johnson faces two felony charges for human trafficking.

Rhode Island

Mar. 24, 2015: Rhode Island State Police arrested a Massachusetts man, Adolfo Hernandes, and charged him with sex trafficking of a minor and possession with intent to deliver crack cocaine. Photographs of a 17-year old girl who was a runaway appeared on a website. Police found her at a motel in Warwick.

South Carolina

Mar. 3, 2015: The North Charleston Police Department charged Daewon Jerrell Warren with human trafficking of a minor. Investigators received information that a young girl was being compelled to perform sex acts at a Motel 6. They rescued the victim and charged Warren. Police state that, if the victim disobeyed Warren’s rules, Warren would assault her by punching her in the face and choking her.

Tennessee

Mar. 22, 2015: An undercover Nashville policeman responded to an ad on the Internet and encountered Fenshan Quan, who offered another woman to perform sexual acts. The two women were arrested. Upon questioning, it became clear to officials that one woman was a victim of trafficking. She had been flown in from New York earlier in the week and was clearly fearful of Quan.

Mar. 9, 2015: Two Georgia men, James Green Jr. and James Harris, were arrested by officials from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation in connection with an ongoing human trafficking investigation. The arrests stem from an investigation involving a minor female that dates back to 2011.
Texas

**Mar. 24, 2015:** A Lubbock County grand jury has indicted Diewon Ray Cyphers on felony human trafficking charges. An 18-year old woman from California left the motel room when Cyphers passed out from intoxication and reached out to Children of the Night, a nonprofit group that rescues children from prostitution. The organization contacted Lubbock police. The woman says that Cyphers had held her identification cards, money, and phone and had forced her to have sex with 14 men before she escaped.

**Mar. 6, 2015:** Two Austin men, Derwin Kerr and Dominic Mitchell, have been charged with trafficking a child. The victim was reported as a missing person in January and found by investigators with the Austin Department of Public Safety a month later at one of the suspects’ apartments. They had connected with the child online and convinced her to meet them. When she did, they took her home and allegedly advertised her online as a sexual partner.

Virginia

**Mar. 8, 2015:** The Manassas City Police Department, with assistance from several other state and federal law enforcement agencies, announced that four suspects were charged in February for their alleged involvement in human trafficking and gang-related activity. The suspects are allegedly involved with the Mara Salvatrucha street gang, better known as MS-13.

Wisconsin

**Mar. 4, 2015:** After an investigation lasting several weeks, Racine County Sheriff’s officers arrested 18-year old Michael Conners and charged him with trafficking of a child. The victims involved are 13 and 16 years old. Conners allegedly agreed to give a ride to one of the girls to Racine where he knew she was selling herself.

**Articles of General Interest**

Loyola University released a study of human trafficking among clients at Covenant House in New Orleans. The study indicates that 896 homeless youths a year coming to Covenant House have been a victim of human trafficking.

Sarasota has started a new program to address human trafficking and prostitution. The Turn Your Life Around program allows those facing prostitution charges to seek help and have charges dropped rather than serve jail time. Since the program began, 30 individuals have gone through it. Those facing prostitution charges meet with a case manager who develops a personalized treatment plan for them.

San Diego schools are showing a documentary called “Indoctrination: The Grooming of Our Children into Prostitution.” According to law enforcement, gang related pimping is the second largest source of money for San Diego street gangs. The estimate is that it brings in $97 million a year to gang members in the city.
Belhaven University and the Beautiful Ones Ministries have released a report about domestic minor sex trafficking in Mississippi. The report states that at least 90 children in the central Mississippi are victims of child sex trafficking and many of these are sold for money and drugs by their own parents.

Boston Mayor Marty Walsh announced the launch of the Boston chapter of CEASE (Cities Empowered Against Sexual Exploitation). The cities which are members of CEASE pledge to reduce the demand for paid sex by targeting those who buy it. The program’s goal is to reduce demand for buying sex by 20 percent online and 80 percent at the street level over the next two years.

Volunteers are talking to hotels and motels in the Columbus, Ohio, area to teach them red flags associated with sex trafficking. Over 20,000 athletes and 250,000 visitors were expected in Central Ohio during the Arnold Sports Festival.

In Los Angeles, operators of motels that are receiving money from the county to provide short-term housing for the destitute are required to sign a statement promising not to participate or allow any form of sex trafficking on their premises and to undergo training on red flags.