

ANNUAL
REPORT

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

**2020 HUMAN
TRAFFICKING**



DAVE YOST
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL



The Attorney General's Office
protects Ohio and its families.

Our actions are driven by their interests,
guided by the rule of law
and the relentless pursuit of justice.

We seek to constrain evil and empower good,
without partisan preference
or subjective judgment, as defined
by the law and by the Constitutions
of the United States and Ohio.



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My fellow Ohioans,

Human trafficking is a real problem in Ohio, one that is often poorly understood.

But our awareness is evolving. Where once we regarded prostitutes as lawbreakers responsible for their crimes, we now understand that more often they are victims. The people who exploit them are the criminals, whether they are the customers buying sex or traffickers supplying that demand.

In 2020, the community that is united in fighting trafficking in Ohio made great strides in reforming state law to reflect this new understanding. Beginning in mid-April, buyers of sex will face enhanced penalties – and no longer the same penalties faced by those coerced into selling themselves.

I take pride in this victory and the role my office and our Human Trafficking Initiative played in writing and championing the change – some notably good news amid the challenges of 2020.

There is no denying that the COVID-19 pandemic fed the chaos that human traffickers live to exploit – children spent more time online, adults lost jobs and our social ties suffered. Still, my team refused to waver in our mission to make Ohio a sanctuary for survivors and a torment for traffickers. This annual report benchmarks our work against both sex and labor trafficking, including:

- In its second year, the Human Trafficking Initiative presented our first Human Trafficking Summit, shared best practices across Ohio and warned families about online risks for kids.
- Law enforcement task forces organized by my office's Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission caught scores of traffickers and johns and assisted trafficking victims.
- We proposed measures to strengthen state trafficking laws, including the solicitation change. Although other items did not make it through the legislature, we know that the road to new understandings and legal change can be long. Taking the first step is absolutely critical.

No matter what 2021 yields, my team and I pledge to continue striving for a trafficking-free Ohio. To quote the freedom fighter Nelson Mandela, "It always seems impossible until it's done."

Yours,

Dave Yost
Ohio Attorney General

ABOUT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is the illegal use of vulnerable people to make a profit through sex work or labor, and this societal scourge is happening right now throughout Ohio. No community within our borders – whether city, suburb or rural – is immune. In fact, our state ranks among the 10 worst in the nation for human trafficking.

Ohio defines labor trafficking as “involuntary servitude” and sex trafficking as compelled sexual activity for hire. Sex trafficking can include prostitution, but prostitution does not necessarily constitute sex trafficking. The distinction is easily remembered as “2 vs. 3”: Unlike prostitution, sex trafficking must involve a third-party beneficiary, meaning that someone besides the two people engaged in the sexual act is involved. Commonly, the third party – the one who profits – is a pimp, boyfriend or girlfriend, friend or relative.

For adults and those ages 16 and 17, Ohio law required law enforcement to show that victims were compelled by a third party to engage in involuntary sex with paying customers. For those 15 and younger, prostitution involving a third-party beneficiary automatically constituted sex trafficking, with or without compulsion. One of 2020’s biggest triumphs was correcting that gap in the Trafficking in Persons statute. Effective April 12, 2021, all minors will be treated the same and compulsion by the third party will no longer need to be proved.

One of 2020’s biggest triumphs in the fight against human trafficking was a change made to Ohio law that says 16- and 17-year-olds should be treated the same as all other minors who are victimized.

When people think of sex trafficking, they often imagine a stranger – the third party referred to in Ohio law – pulling up in white van and kidnapping a young victim, or keeping a young woman locked in chains. These perceptions, however, are mostly myth: The vast majority of traffickers know their victims well; many also know their victims’ families. Human traffickers rely on building close relationships with their targets to develop trust and identify vulnerabilities, often a need missing from the victim’s life. Then the trafficker exploits those vulnerabilities to compel the victim into being trafficked.

It is a lucrative business – globally, a multibillion-dollar industry – that robs children, teenagers and adults of their freedom. Estimates for the number of victims worldwide range from 24.9 million to about 70 million.

People of any age, race, sex or socioeconomic status can fall victim to human trafficking, but certain factors have been shown to make individuals more vulnerable. The nonprofit Polaris, which operates the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline, identifies the following as significant risk factors:

- Substance use
- Mental health concerns
- Recent migration or relocation
- Involvement with the child welfare system
- Being a runaway
- Homelessness

AG YOST'S HUMAN TRAFFICKING INITIATIVE

Not long after taking office in 2019 as Ohio's 51st attorney general, Dave Yost identified the fight against human trafficking as one of the top priorities of his administration. To that end, he created the Human Trafficking Initiative (HTI), whose mission is to end labor and sex trafficking statewide by building awareness, empowering Ohioans to join the battle within their communities, helping victims, and ensuring that traffickers and johns are brought to justice.

As part of the initiative, HTI team members collaborate with social-service agencies, state and federal agencies, law enforcement agencies on all levels, nonprofit organizations and anti-human trafficking coalitions. They have conducted both basic and advanced training for such agencies as well as businesses, community groups, Rotary clubs and more.

Priorities of the HTI

Ending both sex trafficking and labor trafficking in Ohio are priorities of the HTI, which on the broadest level aims to equip all Ohioans with the necessary knowledge and resources to recognize the warning signs of human trafficking and report any suspicious activities to the proper authorities.

More specifically, the HTI team has established the following strategies:

- Focus on prevention and education to stem the victimization of one human being for another's profit. These efforts include helping youths and raising awareness among them.
- Promote legislative policy to ensure that Ohio is doing what it can to fight trafficking.
- Assist and train task forces and prosecutors to build human trafficking cases and develop more task forces throughout the state.
- Streamline how victims and survivors access services, with an emphasis on identifying and closing gaps in wraparound services.
- Reinforce collaboration and discussion among Ohio stakeholders to strengthen and unify community responses to human trafficking.

Because resources and awareness vary widely throughout the state, the connections that the HTI team makes as it travels Ohio are becoming a valuable resource. As team members learn of successes by certain organizations in particular areas, they work with those groups to spread "best practices" to other communities so that all Ohioans can benefit from effective strategies and shared wisdom.

The HTI team

The members of the HTI team:

- **Jennifer Rausch**, legal director, focuses on education and helps task forces and prosecutors build better cases. She previously led the Special Victims Unit at the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office.
- **Jomel Aird**, director of victim services, works to connect and strengthen human trafficking services throughout the state. Before joining the AGO, she worked as a victim advocate for the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force and the Salvation Army, as well as the Palm Beach County's State Attorney's Office.
- **Emily Billman**, anti-human trafficking coordinator, helps identify gaps in victim services and spread awareness statewide. The 2019 graduate of Miami University has led street outreach teams in Columbus for the anti-trafficking organization Out of Darkness.

HTI's partners within the Attorney General's Office

The fight against human trafficking is a highly collaborative effort involving the AGO, social-service agencies, law enforcement agencies, nonprofit organizations and anti-human trafficking coalitions throughout the state. Within the AGO, the HTI team works with the following partners:

- **Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission:** In late 2019, AG Yost reconvened the Ohio Human Trafficking Commission, which originated with Attorney General Richard Cordray and was then reconstituted by Attorney General Mike DeWine. The commission continued to evolve in 2020 and began to work on important projects. The subcommittees were formalized and immediately got to work. They include Law Enforcement, Victim Services, Research/Gap Analysis and Data, Public Awareness, Demand Reduction, Legal and Legislative, and Healthcare. The commission also added a new voice to the group: survivors of human trafficking. These Advisory Council Ambassadors ensure that those with lived experience inform our work.

The commission, set to meet quarterly, is charged with working collaboratively with the attorney general's HTI team and its partners to help develop methods for ending human trafficking. That work continued throughout 2020, bringing together experts from throughout Ohio.

- **Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission (OOCIC):** Led by the attorney general, OOCIC provides structure and support to local law enforcement agencies in Ohio that have uncovered organized criminal entities within their jurisdictions. As a primary tool, OOCIC uses special task forces, which it forms by pairing law enforcement agencies together to combat the criminal enterprises. Multiple task forces target human trafficking in Ohio.

- **Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI):** BCI agents provide staffing, technical expertise and technological resources to human trafficking task forces and local law enforcement agencies. BCI's Special Victims Unit helps local authorities investigate and prosecute those who commit crimes against children, including human traffickers, sexual abusers and other offenders. Additional resources are provided through BCI's Cyber Crimes, Criminal Intelligence and Technical Operations units: manpower for human trafficking investigations and prosecutions; forensic analysis; training and technical assistance; equipment loans; and victim advocacy. BCI also aggregates trafficking data reported by law enforcement agencies in the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway; the numbers are included in this report.
- **Ohio Peace Office Training Academy (OPOTA):** OPOTA trains law enforcement officers to identify and investigate human trafficking in Ohio. Since Ohio's Safe Harbor Law was enacted in 2012, all new peace officers have been required to participate in an OPOTA-approved course on human trafficking. The curriculum has been updated, and the HTI team is working on new content for online OPOTA courses and a two-day in-person class.

Human Trafficking Summit 2020

Given his priority on fighting trafficking, Attorney General Yost has committed his office to planning and presenting a statewide Human Trafficking Summit.

The HTI team spent the last quarter of 2019 organizing the inaugural event, which came to fruition on Jan. 9, 2020, at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. Six hundred freedom fighters attended. Four workshops were presented: "Labor Trafficking 101," "The Story of Rahab," "The Importance of a Multidisciplinary Team" and "Specialty Dockets: Rethinking Justice." Each session provided a way for attendees to collectively identify gaps in Ohio's battle against human trafficking and to share success stories, lessons learned and best practices.

Participants also heard from Attorney General Yost, state Sen. Teresa Fedor, Freedom ala Cart, CATCH Court's Butterflies, Nationwide Children's Hospital's Child Advocacy Center and Dr. Elaine Richardson, who performed a one-woman show portraying, through music and spoken word, her journey from victim to professor. The HTI team rounded out the day with "Hope in Action," a session of messages of encouragement from survivors and "bite-size" pieces of information that attendees could use in their everyday work.

Preparations for the 2021 Human Trafficking Summit began during the summer of 2020. COVID-19 restrictions prompted the HTI team to plan an entirely virtual format. In spite of such challenges, the summit grew exponentially — over 1,400 people joined the event on Jan. 14, 2021. Fifteen workshops were offered, covering health care, social services, law enforcement, government and social justice. The summit's success convinced the HTI team of the importance of offering a virtual aspect during future in-person summits.

Awareness campaign

In 2020, the pandemic shut down or limited many schools and traditional “safe space” programs for children and teenagers, and simultaneously stretched many parents thin, with their attention taxed at home by the competing demands of their job(s) and their kids’ new circumstances. In many homes, the result was a surplus of unsupervised screen time for young people. In response, the HTI team doubled down on their educational outreach in an effort to alert families to the risks. Human traffickers, after all, often use the internet to seek out vulnerable children who can be exploited by a seemingly well-meaning “boyfriend” or “girlfriend.”

These resources were produced and then shared via social media and the HTI website:

- [Videos](#) alerting Ohioans to human trafficking and the need to keep children safe from online predators.
- A [parent resource guide](#) full of tips for protecting kids when they go online.
- A [parent resource guide](#) warning about common apps that pose dangers for kids.

The HTI’s website (www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/humantrafficking), which came online in February 2020, includes valuable information to help fight and prevent human trafficking. The website provides warning signs of human trafficking, myths, contact information for local and national resources, as well as awareness resources that can be shared by stakeholders.

Earlier in 2020, before the pandemic led to restrictions, the HTI team visited a high school in Erie County and made appearances at special events and on podcasts to raise awareness about human trafficking.

STATE LEGISLATION

In November 2019, AG Yost teamed with a bipartisan group of state lawmakers in announcing major legislative initiatives targeting human trafficking in Ohio, including a measure centering on the AG’s priority goal of reducing the demand for paid sex. The proposed legislation separates the buying and selling of sex into different criminal offenses; establishes a criminal offense for knowingly receiving proceeds from a prostitute; and creates a public registry for arrests of johns, pimps and traffickers.

Although not every item on the “wish list” passed the General Assembly, great strides were made during 2020. By the end of the year, the legislature had passed House Bill 431, which included a provision that eliminates the legal distinction between trafficking victims who are younger than 16 and those who are 16 or 17. Under the previous version of Ohio’s Trafficking in Persons offense (ORC 2905.32), the element of compulsion needed to be proved during prosecutions of cases with victims who were 16 or 17 years old. This provision ran contrary to Ohio laws that treat all people younger than 18 as minors and provided a loophole for many traffickers. The passage of House Bill 431 closed that loophole, extending much-needed protections to ALL of Ohio’s minors.

House Bill 431 also provided Ohio with a weapon to use in the fight to end demand — it separated the act of buying sex from the act of selling sex. Now, those who purchase sex will face a first-degree misdemeanor and a fine of up of \$1,500. Judges also must sentence these buyers to “john school,” a class during which they will learn what they are really buying. The classes can vary from county to county but might include presentations from a detective who investigates human trafficking, a prosecutor who speaks on the criminal ramifications of engaging in this behavior and/or a health care provider who discusses health hazards. Sometimes a survivor of sex trafficking shares his or her experience and speaks about the impact of buyers.

LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

As noted, the fight against human trafficking in Ohio is a highly collaborative effort encompassing a wide range of resources statewide. For its part, the Ohio Attorney General’s Office offers investigative resources through regional human trafficking task forces that are overseen and supported by OOCIC; provides training to law enforcement officers through OPOTA; and provides case support through resources housed at BCI, including the Special Victims Unit and the Criminal Intelligence Unit. To help educate the public on the scope of the problem in Ohio, BCI annually reports statewide statistics on human trafficking, as provided by local law enforcement agencies.

Human trafficking task forces

During 2020, three OOCIC human-trafficking task forces operated in the state: the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, with the Columbus Division of Police as the lead agency; the Cuyahoga Regional Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Office; and the Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the Mahoning County Sheriff’s Office.

COVID-19 presented a big obstacle to task forces in 2020, but they persevered and continued bringing traffickers to justice. Collectively in 2020, the task forces also rescued 103 human trafficking victims and referred almost 216 others to services.

Here are notable successes logged by the task forces:

- **February 2020:** Dr. Randolph Brown and Joyce Richmond, both of Cuyahoga County, were indicted on human trafficking charges after an investigation conducted by the Cuyahoga Regional Human Trafficking Task Force.
- **Also in February:** Ronald Hellman Jr. of Youngstown was sentenced to 15 years in prison after being convicted of trafficking in persons, sexual battery and promoting prostitution. He trafficked young women, including children, exiting drug rehab. The Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force brought Hellman to justice.

“This task force is tenaciously telling human traffickers who dare to set foot in the Mahoning Valley – don’t buy sex in Ohio!” Attorney General Yost said.

- **March 2020:** The Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force assisted in planning a sting operation aimed at online sexual solicitation of minors. The effort resulted in the arrest of eight men seeking to buy sex via the internet. This partnership of multiple law enforcement agencies demonstrates how the task forces assist nonparticipating members.
- **August 2020:** Three Columbus men were indicted by a Franklin County grand jury on 23 felony charges, including trafficking in persons. The indictments marked the culmination of the hard work of the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force after it received a tip about one of the men and his illegal activities. That man targeted vulnerable women who were fighting addiction, exploiting them for his own financial gain using threats, drugs and physical violence.
- **Also in August:** Two Austintown Township men were arrested on child pornography charges after an investigation by the Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force. Pornography can be another means of exploitation, and the task forces are dedicated to using their skills in any way they can to best serve victims.
- **September 2020:** Paul Chiles, aka “Tommy Guns,” was indicted by a Franklin County grand jury on 19 felony charges, including trafficking in persons and involuntary manslaughter. The Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force investigated the case.
- **October 2020:** Portsmouth attorney Michael Mearan was indicted by a Scioto County grand jury on 18 felony counts, including trafficking in persons. The case was investigated by a special OOCIC task force, and lawyers from the Attorney General’s Office are acting as special prosecutors.
- **Also in October:** Operation Autumn Hope, a large-scale human trafficking sting, resulted in dozens of arrests. It was a collaborative effort involving more than 50 Ohio law enforcement agencies and social service providers. “The success is measured not only in the number of arrests but in the lives that were rescued from this evil,” Attorney General Yost said. “Every agency on this team looks for the day when no person is bought and sold in Ohio.”

Results included:

- 109 human trafficking victims were rescued and referred to services by the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, Columbus Police PACT Unit and Cuyahoga County Human Trafficking Task Force.
- 76 missing and exploited children cases were cleared, including 45 physical recoveries of children by the U.S. Marshals Service. One recovery was linked to an individual in Columbus suspected of human trafficking.
- 22 people seeking to have sex with a minor were arrested by the Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force and the Franklin County Sheriff’s ICAC Task Force. Those arrested and charged included a pastor, college students and a rehabilitation resident adviser.

- 157 men were arrested on charges of soliciting and other crimes by law enforcement agencies in Cuyahoga, Franklin and Lucas counties. This portion of Operation Autumn Hope focused on the demand aspect of human trafficking, netting an attorney, a fireman and a motivational speaker, among others.
- **December 2020:** The Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force assisted the Liberty Township Police Department in conducting a one-day trafficking sting that led to the arrest of 14 men.

“John stings deter those seeking to purchase sex – reducing the demand for human trafficking – and serve as a reminder that these crimes are more prevalent and closer to home than you may think,” Attorney General Yost said.

Law enforcement training

The Ohio Peace Office Training Academy continues to train local law enforcement to both identify and investigate cases of human trafficking throughout the state. Under Ohio’s Safe Harbor Law, all new peace officers are required to take an OPOTA-approved course on investigating human trafficking.

OPOTA underwent significant changes in 2020 as part of an effort to bring the highest level of training to Ohio’s law enforcement officers. The HTI team is working on updating the human trafficking courses on OPOTA Online and will be part of the instruction team for a two-day, in-depth human trafficking investigation course.

In 2020, a total of 1,740 Ohio peace officers and other law enforcement professionals completed the human trafficking course through OPOTA. That number includes 1,255 new peace officers who took the course as part of required basic training; 396 law enforcement officers who completed it through eOPOTA, the academy’s online classroom; and 89 who completed the course through an OPOTA instructor-led class.

Law enforcement statistics on human trafficking

The data detailed in this report mirrors that provided in previous annual reports. The HTI team noted some inherent ambiguities in the reporting form last year and made strides toward implementing a new reporting form for law enforcement in 2020. That new form is set to launch on OHLEG in March 2021, and the HTI team will be training law enforcement on the changes. As a result, stronger information should be included in next year’s report.

Ohio law requires local law enforcement agencies to collect data on their human trafficking investigations and forward that information annually to the Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The data collected for 2020 shows that law enforcement reported 216 human trafficking investigations leading to 76 arrests and 18 successful criminal convictions.

Law enforcement agencies also reported the number of potential victims, traffickers and consumers/johns.

Females were the most commonly identified human trafficking victims reported by law enforcement during 2020. Last year, there were a total of 148 potential victims identified, including 146 potential victims of sex trafficking and three potential victims of labor trafficking. (Note that a single individual could have been a victim of both sex trafficking and labor trafficking.)

Gender	Number of potential victims
Female	147
Male	1
No gender listed	0

Age	Number of potential victims
15 & under	18
16-17	14
18-20	17
21-29	58
30-40	31
41-59	9
60 & older	0
No age listed	1

Race	Number of potential victims
White	101
Black	33
Asian/Pacific Islander	12
American Indian/Native Alaskan	0
Unknown	2

Law enforcement agencies identified 95 suspected traffickers in 2020, 94 potential sex traffickers and three potential labor traffickers. (Note that a single individual could have been trafficked in both sex and labor.)

Gender	Number of suspected traffickers
Male	80
Female	15
No gender listed	0

Age	Number of suspected traffickers
17 & under	0
18-20	6
21-29	26
30-40	40
41-59	19
60 & older	4
No age listed	0

Race	Number of suspected traffickers
Black	59
White	32
Asian/Pacific Islander	2
American Indian/Native Alaskan	0
Unknown	2

Last year, 17 suspected buyers (aka johns) were identified by law enforcement agencies as consumers of sex trafficking connected to a human trafficking investigation. No consumers of labor trafficking were identified in 2020.

Gender	Number of suspected consumers
Male	17
Female	0
No gender listed	0

Age	Number of suspected consumers
17 & under	0
18-20	0
21-29	0
30-40	6
41-59	2
60 & older	9
No age listed	0

Race	Number of suspected consumers
Black	1
White	14
Asian/Pacific Islander	0
American Indian/Native Alaskan	0
Unknown	12

Social/economic factors contributing to a victim being trafficked, as identified by law enforcement agencies:

- Drug, alcohol or other dependency: 106
- Runaway or homeless status: 19
- Undocumented status: 0
- Oppressed, marginalized and/or impoverished: 81
- Truancy: 9
- Other factors: 16

Trafficking can involve movement of victims across cities, states or the country.

Identified methods of transportation:

- Motor vehicle: 128
- Airplane: 5
- Other: 3



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