



*The Office of*  
**HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
PREVENTION**

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF PROGRAMS AND PLANNING

*Prevention • Protection • Promoting Healing & Justice*

**LOUISIANA HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
PREVENTION COMMISSION**

**2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

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**PRESENTED TO :**

**LOUISIANA LEGISLATURE  
GOVERNOR JOHN BEL EDWARDS**

**DECEMBER 2023**

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## Message from Governor John Bel Edwards



Thank you for taking a moment to read this annual report submitted by the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission. As my term approaches its end, I want you to know that it has been an honor to serve as a state leader against the scourge of human trafficking. Over the last several years, I have signed ground-breaking legislation to combat this issue through creating the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention and signing Act 662 to enhance the state's response to addressing this issue. Together with the support of many stakeholders, the State of Louisiana has secured nearly 4.2 million state and federal dollars to address this issue and improve outcomes for victims. Through the support of this commission, we now have a statewide model of care being implemented in every region of our state to improve victims' access to services. Minor victims now have access to advocacy services available to them 24/7. We also have new reporting processes and referral protocols.

I want to thank the leadership and members of the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Human Trafficking Prevention Advisory Board for their efforts over the last several years including in 2023. Your dedication to researching best practices and innovative solutions to explore implementing in our state has made a tremendous impact. I am also deeply proud of my wife Donna who has made this issue a priority through her foundation and has used her platform to bolster Louisiana's efforts. I want each of you to know that Donna and I will remain dedicated to the prevention of human trafficking and eradicating this heinous crime. Lastly, I want to thank all of our partners and citizens who are devoted in this fight to prevent human trafficking. Together we will continue to make a difference.

May God bless you and may God continue to bless the great state of Louisiana.

**Message from Dr. Dana Hunter**  
**Governor's Office of Human Trafficking Prevention**  
**Executive Director**



We should all be so very proud of the collective efforts of our state to combat and address human trafficking. Together, we have secured federal and state dollars to improve a coordinated response for juvenile victims. We have developed and launched the state's first statewide public awareness campaign: Stop Trafficking La: Human Trafficking is R.E.A.L. We have trained more than 5,000 professionals across the state in various disciplines. We have developed a standardized human trafficking curriculum as well as a specific labor trafficking training curriculum. Louisiana now has a web-based resource directory for stakeholders, survivors, and everyday citizens. Lastly, we have engaged survivors to provide leadership and support for each of the afore-named efforts. We are proud to say that our anti-trafficking initiatives here in Louisiana have been victim-centered and survivor-informed.

We are eternally thankful to both First Lady Donna Edwards and her husband Governor John Bel Edwards for their leadership and support over the last 8 years. As we look ahead, let us continue to work together to implement more victim-centered and offender focused efforts and strategies across the state as well as enhance services and support for survivors. Let us also continue listening and learning from survivors. I am confident that our model of participatory program development and implementation will continue to move our state in the right direction to end this crime. A special thanks to the OHTP staff for their hard work and dedication and the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board for their tireless efforts over the last year. May God bless each of you and the children and families of the great state of Louisiana.



## **Message from Chief Tommy Clark Jr., Commission Chair**



The Louisiana Human Trafficking Prevention Commission is comprised of members who are dedicated to bringing attention to and striving towards eradicating this modern-day form of slavery. These individuals reflect a diverse group of professional experts and community leaders from multiple disciplines committed to restoring the lives of victims of human trafficking, to improving the state's response to human trafficking, and to developing effective early intervention initiatives to combat human trafficking before it occurs. Currently, we have focused our framework on the following: Prevention, Identification, Intervention, and Prosecution. By educating and training service providers, stakeholders, and government agencies, we can enhance partnerships and coalitions. This Commission is committed to identify best practices, policies, and programs to prevent this heinous crime. Furthermore, as we partner between federal, state, and local jurisdictions and nongovernmental organizations we are committed to increased collaboration and continuity of services. The continued success of the Commission depends on our expertise and commitment to the citizens of Louisiana.

## **Message from Michelle Johnson, Advisory Board Chair**



Louisiana is considered a hotspot for human trafficking due to the demand for commercial sex and labor exploitation for numerous reasons. Traffickers, too often, prey on our most vulnerable citizens, and it is the responsibility of this membership to combat the work of traffickers and to ensure we are effectively responding to the unique needs of our victims. It is for this reason that our Commission and Advisory Board has been focusing its efforts towards labor trafficking prevention, expanding services to rural communities and every part of Louisiana, and increasing our understanding of the intersection of human trafficking and natural disasters. Combating human trafficking requires collaboration amongst key agencies and the public at large. I am grateful for the membership of this Commission and Advisory Board for their dedication to the principle of collaboration both within our board meetings and outside of them. Personally, I have worked with countless members of this body both in serving victims and in educating community members. Their commitment shines through this report. I would like to thank the members of the commission, advisory board, and the subcommittee's who took time out to attend the meetings and provide expertise involving human trafficking over the past year. I would also like to thank Governor John Bel Edwards and the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention for their commitment to addressing human trafficking and their support throughout the past year. Lastly I would like to thank the survivor leaders who contributed their time, lived experience, and expertise to our subcommittees and to informing the work of the Commission and Advisory Board.

## **I. Overview of the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board**

The Louisiana Human Trafficking Prevention Commission (the “Commission”) and Advisory Board (the “Advisory Board”) was created within the Office of the Governor during the 2017 Louisiana Regular Legislative Session. Comprised of public leaders, service providers, law enforcement, and survivor leaders, the Commission and Advisory Board oversee statewide efforts to address human trafficking. By effect of Act 352 of the 2021 Regular Session, the Governor’s Office of Human Trafficking Prevention (OHTP) was created and is responsible for oversight and assistance to the Commission and Advisory Board in accomplishing its goals. Oversight of the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board was a duty previously held by the Governor’s Office Children’s Cabinet under the leadership of Dr. Dana Hunter. In July of 2021, Dr. Hunter was appointed by Governor John Bel Edwards to serve as the Executive Director of the newly established Office of Human Trafficking Prevention.

The Commission reviews statewide gaps in prevention and intervention services, supports the development of anti-trafficking programs and initiatives, and provides annual recommendations to improve Louisiana’s human trafficking response. The Advisory Board assists the Commission by providing input and recommendations from the perspectives of survivor-serving agencies, victim advocates, and survivors. The Commission may establish subcommittees to further its goals. Each year, a chairperson and co-chair are elected by the Commission from among its membership. The Advisory Board also elects members to serve as a chair and co-chair. The Commission and Advisory Board chairs and co-chairs along with the staff of the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention comprise the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board’s Executive Team.

The Commission is required to issue an annual report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Senate no later than the first day of February each year. This report is submitted by the Louisiana Human Trafficking Prevention Commission pursuant L.a. Revised Statute RS 46:2165.

## **II. 2023 Year in Review**

In 2023, the Commission, Advisory Board, and its subcommittee continued to strengthen access and continuity of anti-trafficking efforts across the state. The following report marks the final report of the Commission and Advisory Board under Governor John Bel Edwards’ administration. The Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board held six meetings in 2023. The Commission elected Chief Tommy Clark Jr., Chief of Police of the City of Grambling, to continue to serve as the chairperson of the Commission and Captain Belinda Murphy of Louisiana State Police to serve as co-chair. The Advisory Board elected Michelle Johnson to serve as the chairperson of the Advisory Board with Casey Morace as the co-chair.

The Commission adopted a guiding framework that focused its responses on four key areas: prevention, identification of victims, intervention and services, and justice and

prosecution outcomes. The Commission created three subcommittees tasked with identifying gaps and developing recommendations that align with the framework in their area of focus: labor trafficking and immigration; sex trafficking of minor victims; and sex trafficking of adult victims. The subcommittees meetings were held in the interim months between Commission meetings. At each Commission meeting, the subcommittees provided updates on their work and progress. The Commission's three subcommittees produced four recommendations. The subcommittees submitted a report to be included in this annual report with more information on gaps in their area of focus and their proposed recommendations, which may be found in the appendix.

Commission meeting topics included statewide and regional training efforts, legislative actions, and new initiatives and partnerships with an emphasis on labor trafficking response. In 2023, the Commission hosted an array of guest speakers, who provided presentations on strategies to expand services to labor trafficking victims, reporting labor exploitation, natural disasters and human trafficking, among others. Furthermore, the Commission supported key legislation involving human trafficking during the 2023 Regular Legislative session. At the May 2023 meeting, the Commission voted to recommend favorable passage by the Louisiana Legislature of Senate Bill 31 by Senator Mizell (subsequently Act 386); Senate Bill 192 by Senator Smith (subsequently Act 286); and Senate Bill 215 ("Justice for Survivors Act") by Senate Barrow. The legislative action, supported by Commission, Advisory Board, and its subcommittee members, proved to further bolster Louisiana's commitment to a victim-centered response to human trafficking.

The meetings also featured routine updates from the Department of Children and Family Services and the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention on the implementation of Act 662 (2022 Regular Session). Supported by the Commission the prior year, Act 662 funds statewide services for minor victims of human trafficking and creates a single-point of entry for referrals of sex trafficking victims of minors through the DCFS Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline.

Finally, the valuable work of the Commission lies not only in its function to guide the state's progress in addressing trafficking but also through its convening authority, bringing together diverse and dedicated stakeholders for information sharing and collaboration. In 2023, members hosted and partnered on numerous training and outreach activities, collaborated in serving victims and survivors, promoted new resources and research, and advocated for best practices statewide. In addition, many members participated in a national research study by RTI International on human trafficking and natural disasters. A copy of the RTI International report entitled, "Advancing the field: Human trafficking and Natural Disasters," can be found in the appendix. The research findings include specific recommendations for Louisiana partners to better respond to human trafficking in the wake of a natural disaster.

### **III. 2023 Recommendations and Legislative Priorities**

The Commission and Advisory Board adopted four recommendations for 2023 that highlight the need for increased screening of children and youth, outreach to vulnerable populations, and victim-centered criminal justice responses. The following

legislative recommendations were approved by a two-thirds vote of Commission members present, per RS 46:2165. For additional background on the recommendations, please review the subcommittee reports.

1. The Commission recommends legislation requiring screening of children and youth in local licensed detention facilities and for youth in the Office of Juvenile Justice Secure Care Facilities.
2. The Commission recommends amending RS 15:283(E) to allow alternative means of testifying in court for victims 21 years of age and under.
3. The Commission recommends the Louisiana Department of Corrections create and implement human trafficking prevention and identification protocols.
4. The Commission recommends the Office of Human Trafficking create a coordinated outreach and education of labor trafficking protocol.

#### **IV. 2023 Subcommittee Reports**

Each subcommittee provided to the Commission a final report that summarizes their work over the past year, addressing notable gaps or progress in their areas of focus, and making recommendations to improve statewide responses to human trafficking. The reports are included below in the following order.

- i. Report from the Labor Trafficking & Immigration Subcommittee
- ii. Report from the Subcommittee on Sex Trafficking of Adult Victims
- iii. Report from the Subcommittee on Sex Trafficking of Minor Victims

#### **Labor Trafficking & Immigration Joint Subcommittee Report**

Subcommittee Chair: Jennifer Paul Ray

Secretary: Stuart Smith

Labor trafficking is when a victim is compelled by a trafficker via force, fraud or coercion for the purposes of providing labor services. At the federal level, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) defines several subsets of labor trafficking. *Labor trafficking* falls under the definition of ‘*severe forms of human trafficking*’ which is “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” In 2022, labor trafficking accounted for 2% of reported victims receiving services, and another 4% of combined labor and sex trafficking victims receiving services in Louisiana. Labor trafficking advocates in Louisiana believe labor trafficking is grossly underreported, compared to sex trafficking.

The purpose of these subcommittees are to review gaps in our statewide response to labor trafficking and issues of immigration related to trafficking, and to provide recommendations to the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board. In 2023, the Human

Trafficking Prevention Commission voted to create a subcommittee with a special focus on labor trafficking and immigration. Jennifer Paul Ray chaired the subcommittee with support of secretary Stuart Smith. Subcommittee membership included stakeholders from U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Louisiana Commission on Human Rights, immigration legal clinics, service providers, and more. The following report outlines the work of this subcommittee and its recommendation.

During this year, the subcommittee members from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) worked towards a key recommendation and continued the previous year's work, in close collaboration with the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention, in supporting the Louisiana Natural Disasters and Human Trafficking Outreach Toolkit. The Toolkit was created by a working group formed of members of the 2022 subcommittee. In 2023, the disaster awareness flyers were disseminated to key agencies, including GOHSEP and DCFS. Moreover, many members of this group contributed to the RTI International's research report on natural disasters and human trafficking. The toolkit is accessible for download on the Human Trafficking Prevention Resource Center of Louisiana at <https://humantrafficking.la.gov/resources/disasters/>. In addition, the subcommittee developed a recommendation to bolster the state's effort to respond to labor trafficking. The recommendation that follows reflects the need for a comprehensive prevention and education strategy for labor trafficking, in alignment with the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention's efforts in 2023.

## **Recommendation 1: Coordinated Awareness and Education of Labor Trafficking**

### *Non-Legislative*

#### Overview:

The subcommittee recommends the Office of Human Trafficking implement a coordinated awareness, education, and outreach protocol for labor trafficking.

#### Background:

Louisiana is a hub of human trafficking. The issue is identifying trafficking, and many times individuals don't identify as being trafficked; and, more community outreach to reach vulnerable populations is needed. A lot is the disconnect that many don't understand their rights and that it is okay to recognize the trafficking, and not feel that they will be penalized for speaking this. The industries where individuals are trafficked in Louisiana include construction, ship building, restaurants, retail, service industries, and anywhere quid pro activities exist. Understanding wage violation is important for identifying trafficking and other forms of labor mistreatment. This isn't restricted to foreign nationals. U.S. Citizens are also vulnerable to trafficking.

As a result, this subcommittee recommends the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention (OHTP), with the support of the Commission, coordinate agency response and outreach to labor trafficking. Resources are available across the state, and there is a need for an assessment that can be implemented through a strategic plan that coordinates agencies and reaches vulnerable populations. Moreover, the subcommittee recommends that the Office of Human Trafficking

Prevention with the support of the Commission create a strategic plan for implementing education on labor trafficking to reach vulnerable populations.

### Recommendations:

The subcommittee recommends that the OHTP work closely with public and private partners to coordinate an education and outreach plan directed at vulnerable populations. The partners that the OHTP may formally partner with may include Office of Refugees, Catholic Charities, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. The OHTP has recently developed a labor trafficking curriculum, and they can use this curriculum to train professionals who may come into contact with individuals in high-risk industries for labor trafficking in Louisiana. The subcommittee recommends that the OHTP and partners train the following groups: Chamber of Commerce, Hotel Industry, Construction Industry, and Fishing Industries, Restaurant Industry, Office and home cleaning services, Agricultural industry, Professional Massage Therapists and other health care industries. The high-risk fields that should be targeted for victim identification and outreach include Hotel and Restaurant Industry, Construction Industry, Fishing and Agriculture.

Develop outreach content collaboratively with key stakeholders, such as the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the state of Louisiana Workforce Commission on how to identify trafficking situations in the workforce and how to report such offenses to law enforcement. Examples of wage theft for instance help individuals understand they are victims, and the outreach will guide how individuals can find help. There is a need more public service announcements to the community that it is available and accessible, which can be achieved in collaboration with U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the state of Louisiana Workforce Commission. An example of some outlets to deliver messaging includes Facebook, Telenovela, television, radio, in the churches, service organizations, schools, and children are aware and need guidance on how to report to guidance councils.

In addition to reaching out to industries, the Subcommittee recommends outreach to schools. The purpose of reaching out to schools is to minimize the recruitment of children into labor trafficking situations, such as traveling sales crews and peddling operations. To initiate this effort, recommendations include outreach and training with the state of Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana School Boards Association, Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, Louisiana Association of Educators, Louisiana Retired Teachers Association, Louisiana Federation of Teachers, Louisiana School Nurses Organization, and Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement (Truancy and Assessment Service Centers).

## **Sex Trafficking of Adult Victims Subcommittee Report**

Chair: Sheri Combs

Secretary: Dr. Michelle Nelson, DNP, APRN, FNP-C

The purpose of the subcommittee was to assess, identify and evaluate current gaps within the State of Louisiana regarding adult sex trafficking victims that will improve statewide responses. More importantly, the subcommittee was tasked with making recommendations utilizing the following framework that was approved at the January 2023 Human Trafficking Prevention Commission meeting. This framework consists of prevention, identification, intervention, and prosecution. The subcommittee utilized the framework to guide discussions and reports to bring forth to the Commission. In addition, membership of the subcommittee was composed of survivor leaders, survivor- serving organizations, healthcare providers, Department of Children and Family Services, Louisiana Public Defender Board, and several nonprofit organizations. Over the course of the year, a total of five meetings were held.

Meeting discussions were centered and geared towards current practices and policies across our state regarding victims of human trafficking. The subcommittee identified and discussed several gaps which included a Department of Corrections identification and re-entry program for Survivors, child custodial rights and protections for Survivors, and the development of a social media toolkit with training specifically focused toward media platforms. The report below summarizes the work of this subcommittee's pursuit to ensure adult survivors across the state of Louisiana are identified and provided trauma-informed, wrap-around services.

### **I. Louisiana Law**

Human trafficking is the illegal use of a person for the purpose of providing labor or sexual services. For adult victims of human trafficking, Louisiana law essentially designates three categories within R.S. 14:46.2: 1) human trafficking as the knowing recruitment, harboring, transporting, providing, soliciting, receiving, isolating, or maintaining “the use of another person through fraud, force, or coercion to provide services or labor;” 2) human trafficking when services include commercial sexual activity (“any sexual act performed or conducted when anything of value has been given, promised, or received by any person”); and 3) human trafficking of a person under the age of 21 for the purpose of engaging in commercial sexual activity regardless of the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Louisiana law differs from federal laws in that there exists a special category for victims of sex trafficking under the age of 21, which does not require the presence of force, fraud, or coercion. Criminal penalties for trafficking of children for sexual purposes falls under R.S. 14:46.3. The purview of this subcommittee is human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity of a person 18 years or older.

### **II. Data**

Pursuant to Louisiana R.S. 46: 2161, private entities that provide services to adult victims of human trafficking (R.S. 46:2161.1) shall submit an annual report to the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention (OHTP) including the services offered, geographic areas served, the number of victims served, and status updates on each victim served. In 2022, the OHTP gathered data from 43 agencies across the state and reported that 992 confirmed and suspected victims of



human trafficking were served in calendar year 2022; of this total, there were 779 confirmed and suspected sex trafficking victims served, and 221 victims served were over the age of 18 years. The parishes with the highest number of victims reported trafficking incidences were Orleans, East Baton Rouge, and Caddo parishes. The number of minor victims was higher due to most of the agencies that reported were minor or youth serving agencies. As a result, there was limited data arising from criminal justice agencies such as law enforcement, courts, and correctional institutions.

### **III. Statewide Progress and Gaps**

#### *Prevention*

Human Trafficking awareness has increased over the years gaining attention on media outlets and social media platforms throughout the United States as well as here in Louisiana. Social media is a powerful tool for information sharing globally. However, social media is also a breeding ground for misinformation about human trafficking. This is a nationwide issue, to which Louisiana is not immune. The subcommittee discussed the gaps in accurate dissemination of human trafficking awareness on social media but also the need for trauma-informed news media reporting. Human trafficking is a complex crime, and news outlets may unknowingly report narratives or imagery that reinforces stereotypes or misconceptions about human trafficking. The subcommittee recommends that news outlets review a media toolkit, such as the one created by [Polaris](#), to *tell the real story of human trafficking*, and to work with survivors when crafting content about human trafficking <sup>1</sup>

#### *Identification*

Education is vital in identifying adult sex trafficking victims, who may be missed in court proceedings due to lack of awareness and training of judges, attorneys, and court personnel. Victims of sex trafficking may not self-identify as victims due to fear, manipulation, or trauma bonding with their traffickers. They may perceive their situation as a result of their own choices, making it challenging for them to come forward and seek help. Traffickers often use psychological tactics, threats, and physical violence to control their victims. This may lead to victims being reluctant or unable to disclose their trafficking experiences to law enforcement or during court proceedings. Some victims may have had negative experiences with law enforcement or distrust the criminal justice system, which can discourage them from engaging with the courts or reporting their victimization. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes specialized training for legal professionals, creating safe environments for victims to disclose their experiences, providing support services throughout the legal process, and implementing victim-centered approaches to ensure their voices are heard and their rights protected within the criminal justice system. To address this gap, in part, the subcommittee recommends a proposal to increase identification of victims and training of staff within the Department of Corrections.

#### *Intervention*

Human trafficking is a clandestine crime that often goes undetected unless law enforcement takes proactive measures. Moreover, adult victims are less likely than minor victims

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<sup>1</sup><https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Telling-the-Real-Story-of-Human-Trafficking-by-Polaris.pdf>

to be identified and provided safe, wrap-around services to exit their trafficking. To overcome these barriers, law enforcement should implement proactive investigative techniques and operations. These operations aim to identify and disrupt trafficking networks, recover victims, and bring perpetrators to justice. Authorities can more effectively gather evidence, dismantle criminal networks, and protect potential victims before they are exploited. In addition, these measures need to be combined with an increase in social services for adult victims of human trafficking (individuals over 18 years of age). While Louisiana has successfully funded services across the state for minor victims of human trafficking, there exists no state funding or investment into adult victim services for human trafficking. Together, proactive law enforcement operations and services for adult victims will bolster Louisiana's efforts at providing pathways for more victims to exit "the life."

### *Prosecution and Justice Outcomes*

In past reports, the subcommittee has identified at length the gaps in prosecution and justice for adult victims of sex trafficking. The subcommittee this year discussed an often-forgotten implication of victimization. The subcommittee identifies child welfare involvement of the children of victims of trafficking as a significant area of concern needing additional study and recommendations. Traffickers often force and coerce victims, who are parents, through their children, either by isolating them from their children or expressly threatening to harm the children. A victim may lose custody of their child over the course of their trafficking experience, as a result. Moreover, if recovered, a victim is at risk of permanently losing custody of a child or having parental rights terminated as an indirect result of their victimization. Federal law places significant impediments on providing long term treatment while keeping victims together with their children. However, children significantly benefit from achieving permanency in stable housing, schooling, and community. We recommend that in 2024 this subcommittee further study this issue, and receive input from child welfare professionals such as the appropriate people from the Department of Children and Family Services, Mental Health Advocacy Service, the Legal Services Corporations, and parent representatives in addition to the current expertise available to the subcommittee in developing legislative and service recommendations to provide services for victims while also promoting the best interests of their children. The subcommittee recognizes that justice outcomes does not extend only to their immediate trafficking case but encompasses restorative justice and healing, including the ability to care for one's own children.

## **IV. Findings and Recommendations**

Based on the current gaps identified in our state, the subcommittee identified one significant area to better address sex trafficking among adult victims in Louisiana and have put forth *the following* recommendation to the commission. While the recommendation is non-legislative in nature, the subcommittee has worked closely with the Department of Corrections to identify activities to increase identification of victims who are incarcerated and to increase training of staff. The subcommittee hopes to pursue more concrete actions to address the gaps outlined above in the following years.

## **Department of Corrections Human Trafficking Protocols**

### *Non-Legislative Recommendation*

#### Overview:

The subcommittee recommends that the DOC create and implement human trafficking prevention and identification protocol in order to increase identification of victims and to provide education to inmates on exploitation as part of the reentry program.

#### Background:

There are many adult victims of human trafficking that encounter the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) system due to crimes they are forced to commit while being trafficked. The Louisiana Department of Corrections system currently does not have a protocol to address human trafficking. By training probation and parole officers as well as prison staff on the indicators of human trafficking, more adult victims will be identified and connected to resources. When there is no support for trafficking victims while incarcerated, this makes them more likely to return to trafficking due to no other resources and lacking the understanding of their situation. Not only will these recommendations help to identify victims but will also provide individuals with information on exploitation to reduce the recidivism rate of victims returning to prison.

#### Recommendations:

The Department of Corrections should implement the following programmatic activities:

- Implement human trafficking identification training for prison staff and probation/parole officers during cadet or annual training.
- Implement a human trafficking screening tool to be used during the mental health screening of offenders.
- Implement a sexual exploitation curriculum and support group for trafficking victims and those who engage in the sex trade out of survival. This group would be modeled after the domestic violence curriculum that is currently being taught at LCIW.

## **Sex Trafficking of Minor Victims Subcommittee Report**

Chair: Linsey Courville

Secretary: Maria Isabella Pontoriero

The purpose of the subcommittee was to assess, identify and evaluate current gaps within the State of Louisiana regarding minor sex trafficking victims that will improve statewide responses. Membership of the subcommittee was composed of a diverse group of participants, ranging from survivor leaders, survivor-serving organizations, healthcare providers, and staff from Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Juvenile Justice, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, and several nonprofit organizations. Over the course of the year, this subcommittee held six meetings via zoom. In addition, the subcommittee broke out into separate working groups to focus on specific recommendations. Discussions were centered and geared towards improving current practices and policies across our state regarding minor victims of human trafficking

The subcommittee made recommendations utilizing feedback from the 2022 Shared Hope International Report Card. Shared Hope International's Report Cards on Child and Youth Sex Trafficking are graded under an advanced legislative framework, providing a comprehensive analysis and assessment of all state statutes related to and impacting child and youth sex trafficking victims in the United States. This framework Shared Hope has created, shifts the focus from criminal laws to legislative change, ensuring robust and trauma-informed protections are in place for trafficking victims. Based on the current gaps identified in our state by the Shared Hope International Report Card, the subcommittee identified 5 areas to better address sex trafficking among minor victims in Louisiana and have put forth two legislative recommendations to the commission. The report below summarizes the work of this subcommittee's pursuit to ensure minor victims of human trafficking across the State of Louisiana are identified, recovered, able to receive access to services to improve resilience and connection with service providers.

### **I. Louisiana Law**

Under Louisiana Revised Statute 14:46.2- Human Trafficking:

It shall be unlawful: For any person to knowingly recruit, harbor, transport, provide, solicit, receive, isolate, entice, obtain, or maintain the use of another person through fraud, force, or coercion to provide services or labor. For any person to knowingly recruit, harbor, transport, provide, solicit, sell, purchase, receive, isolate, entice, obtain, or maintain the use of a person under the age of twenty-one years for the purpose of engaging in commercial sexual activity regardless of fraud, force, or coercion. For any person to knowingly benefit from activity. For any person to knowingly facilitate any of the activities by any means, including but not limited to helping, aiding, abetting, or conspiring, regardless of whether a thing of value has been promised to or received by the person.

Under Louisiana revised statute 14:46.3- Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes:

It shall be unlawful: For any person to knowingly recruit, harbor, transport, provide, sell, purchase, receive, isolate, entice, obtain, or maintain the use of a person under the age of

eighteen years for the purpose of engaging in commercial sexual activity. For any person to knowingly benefit from activity...

- For any parent, legal guardian, or person having custody of a person under the age of eighteen years to knowingly permit or consent to such minor entering into any activity...
- For any person to knowingly facilitate any of the activities...
- By any means, including but not limited to helping, aiding, abetting, or conspiring, regardless of whether a thing of value has been promised to or received by the person...
- For any person to knowingly advertise any of the activities...
- For any person to knowingly sell or offer to sell travel services that include or facilitate any of the activities.
- “Commercial sexual activity” means any sexual act performed or conducted when any thing of value has been given, promised, or received by any person.

## **II. Statewide Progress and Gaps**

Based on the 2022 Shared Hope International’s Report Card, the subcommittee identified four gaps in Louisiana’s response to minor victims of human trafficking: (1) requiring juvenile justice system to provide access to specialized services with an emphasis on substance abuse treatment for identified youth; (2) expanding extended foster care to age 23; (3) strengthening existing protections to allow all CSEC youth to testify by an alternative method regardless of a child’s age and the offense; (4) expanding on Louisiana’s Safe Harbor Laws.<sup>2</sup> From this, the subcommittee developed two legislative proposals that were brought forth to the Commission.

The first identified gap is need for the juvenile justice system to provide access to specialized services for identified sex trafficked children and youth, per Policy Goal 3.4 of the Shared Hope Report. The report explained that “While services may be available in conjunction with diversion, diversion is limited to children facing prostitution related charges, and Louisiana law does not provide access to specialized services for all identified sex trafficked children and youth in the juvenile justice system.” With this in mind, the subcommittee worked alongside representatives from the Office of Juvenile Justice to tackle this policy goal. The subcommittee put forth a legislative recommendation to increase screening in secure care facilities and local detention centers, which is detailed below. The second gap that was discussed was the need to expand extended foster care to youth under age 23, per Shared Hope International’s Policy Goal 3.5. Currently, state law extends foster care services to youth under 21 years of age. Extended foster care is vitally important service provided by the Department of Children and Family Services for transitional-aged youth. The subcommittee hopes to conduct further research and exploration into this issue before putting forth a recommendation, and will work with DCFS and

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<sup>2</sup> 2022 Shared Hope International Report Cards on Child and Youth Trafficking, Analysis and Report Louisiana, <https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-State-Analysis-LA.pdf>.

other stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities for expanding extended foster care to age 23.

The third gap identified addresses court testimony of child sex trafficking victims, per Policy Goal 5.2. In order to minimize the risk of traumatization from a child testifying, the subcommittee has put forth a recommendation addressing the topic, which is detailed below.

The final gap that was discussed was expanding Louisiana's current Safe Harbor laws to make it consistent with Louisiana's Safe Harbor laws and also to increase the protections of victims ages 18-20 years olds. According to Shared Hope's analysis:

Louisiana law fails to prohibit the criminalization of minors for prostitution offenses. While several protections exist, providing non-criminalization for prostitution for child sex trafficking victims and establishing a services referral protocol, such safeguards are undermined by conflicting statutes that allow minors, including child sex trafficking victims, to be prosecuted for prostitution and prostitution-related offenses.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, the Safe harbor law prevents child sex trafficking victims under the age of 18 from being arrested and criminalized for prostitution-related offenses (see CHC [Art 725](#)). Shared Hope has identified several Louisiana laws that contradict our Safe Harbor law (including RS), and the subcommittee hopes to provide a future recommendation on the laws that require updating and/or repealing in accordance with Safe Harbor to truly prevent minor victims from being criminalized. In addition, the subcommittee hopes to expand protections to victims under the age of 21, per Revised Statute 14:46.2(A)(1)(b). There is not a clear expression in Louisiana law that dictates victims 18-20 years old should not be arrested for prostitution-related offenses, despite Louisiana law specifically holding that individuals under the age of 20 years engaging in commercial sexual activity *are* victims and force, fraud, and coercion need not be proved.

### *Successes*

Though many gaps were discussed during this year's Minor Sex Trafficking Subcommittee meetings, there were notable successes around protecting and providing services to minor sex trafficking victims. As of January 1st, 2023, Act 662 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session expanded mandatory reporting guideline to require all mandatory reporters to report alleged sex trafficking to the Department of Children and Family Services regardless of whether there is alleged parental or caretaker involvement, and requires DCFS to communicate as soon as possible all reports involving alleged child victims of sex trafficking to La. State Police for referral to local law enforcement. Act 662 (2022) also made care coordination services and advocacy services available to minor sex trafficking victims. Through this new law, Louisiana has allocated funding to wrap-around services for minor victims of human trafficking and services are now available to every minor victim of sex trafficking in the state of Louisiana, in every part of the state.

### **III. Recommendations**

The following two legislative proposals cover the protections and identification of minor

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 9. <https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-State-Analysis-LA.pdf>

sex trafficking victims in Louisiana. In selecting these two recommendations the subcommittee seeks to strengthen the state's response for identifying and protection in minor victims through legislation that 1) improves victim identification and access to resources through the Office of Juvenile Justice when minors are in their custody, and 2) Providing additional protections for victims in court testimony via an alternative method.. The proposals are victim-centered and survivor-informed and were crafted utilizing the expertise of key stakeholders of which this subcommittee is composed. We would like to acknowledge the input, guidance, and expertise of the Office of Juvenile Justice as well as our subcommittee members in crafting these recommendations.

### **Recommendation 1: Screening of Youth in OJJ Licensed Detention Centers and Secure Care Facilities**

#### **Overview:**

The subcommittee recommends legislation that requires the Office of Juvenile Justice to screen youth in their Secure Care Facilities and, in its capacity to license local detention center facilities, to require the local detention facilities to screen youth for human trafficking, substance abuse, mental health, and medical needs.

#### **Background**

As a result of Act 445, the duty of supervising and licensing juvenile detention facilities will be transferred from DCFS (who has supervised these facilities since July 1 of 2013) to the Office of Juvenile Justice, the agency tasked with licensing Louisiana's local detention facilities as well as the supervision of children on probation and parole. To ensure an effective transition between these two agencies, it is imperative to establish specific standards for screening and servicing the youth that they serve. The recommendations enumerated in this document are intended to apply to the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) when they embody this role in 2024. This will prevent a service gap that could result in trafficking victims and substance-addicted youth entering these facilities without being identified and provided with the necessary services. Moreover, to ensure consistency between local and state facilities, the subcommittee recommends requiring OJJ to screen in their Secure Care Facilities as well.

Many youth in the Juvenile Detention System are slipping through the cracks when it comes to addiction and human trafficking identification and response services; these two issues are often deeply interlinked. Implementing screening tools will help identify victims of human trafficking, and requiring services be offered to them will help them overcome this pernicious cycle of addiction and exploitation, and will allow for a more coordinated and proactive response to the needs of youth who may have experienced exploitation. Youth who are trafficked are often introduced to narcotics by their traffickers, who use these tools to manipulate them, perpetuate their exploitation, and induce compliance. It is common for youth victims of trafficking to delay disclosure, however, with the proper guidance and procedures in place, trained staff will be able to identify them and provide services, as their needs are properly addressed.

Client level data from the Governor's Office of Human Trafficking and Prevention annual human trafficking report indicates that 992 victims were recorded in the year 2022<sup>2</sup>, a

statistic that likely undercounts the total number of victims statewide. Of that population, 79.0% of trafficking victims for the data collection year 2022 were reported as sex trafficking victims, and of that, 555 of these victims were age 17 and under. Additionally, 330 of total trafficking victims under the age of 17 during that reporting year were seeking mental health services. The issue of human trafficking is complex and multifaceted, but in the context of juvenile justice institutions, there are steps that can be taken that are clearly a net positive. Validated screening tools are an evidence-based way of identifying suspected and confirmed victims of trafficking. Programs that address the specific issues facing trafficking victims are an evidenced-based way to prevent these victims from re-entering the vicious cycle of trafficking. The juvenile justice system provides the rare opportunity to intervene in this cycle, and introducing rigorous standards to this system is one of the few ways that the State of Louisiana can act to prevent this problem from growing more pernicious.

The transfer of authority over juvenile detention facilities from the Department of Children and Family Services to the Office of Juvenile Justice offers a chance to improve the screening standards for these facilities, as well as the secure care facilities that OJJ is already overseeing. Additionally, the recommendation aligns with the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative. According to the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) is a “comprehensive system reform model that has shown to safely reduce reliance on secure detention.” The aim of JDAI is to provide alternatives to detention for youth offenders and increase public safety through eight core strategies: (1) Collaboration; (2) utilizing data to identify over-arching system issues; (3) utilizing screening tools to identify youth who can qualify for alternatives to secure detention; (4) identification of new or enhanced non-secure alternatives to detention; (5) reforms to case processing procedures; (6) implementing special detention cases for youth who are in detention to due probation violations, writs and warrants; (7) emphasizing the reduction of racial disparities; and (8) improving conditions of confinement. This subcommittee’s recommendation to mandate screening for addiction and human trafficking would increase the efficacy of the JDAI in protecting youth in secure care facilities, by improving access to needed services for these youth.

Our recommendation is that the Office of Juvenile Justice implement the standards enumerated above in order to better detect and address the myriad substance abuse and human trafficking issues that impact the population of children they are legally mandated to serve. In conclusion, the issue of human trafficking is complex and multifaceted, but in the context of juvenile justice institutions, there are steps that can be taken that are clearly a net positive. Validated screening tools are an evidence-based way of identifying suspected and confirmed victims of trafficking. Programs that address the specific issues facing trafficking victims are an evidenced-based way to prevent these victims from re-entering the vicious cycle of trafficking. The juvenile justice system provides the rare opportunity to intervene in this cycle, and introducing rigorous standards to this system is one of the few ways that the State of Louisiana can act to prevent this problem from growing more pernicious.

#### Recommendations:

Mandatory assessment of human trafficking, substance abuse, medical screening, and mental health screening for minors and youth in local licensed-detention facilities, per Act 445 of 2023 Regular Legislative Session, and in state Secure Care Facilities. Proposed language for



admission screening for youth in local licensed detention facilities and for youth in OJJ state secure care facilities, modeled after the DCFS Juvenile Justice Licensing Standards:

1. Mental Health Screening

1. The provider shall use a standardized, validated mental health screening tool to identify youth who may be at risk of suicide or who may need prompt mental health services. Providers will ensure that persons administering the mental health screening tool are annually trained/retrained in its administration and the use of its scores, as recommended by the author of the screening tool if more frequently than annually.
2. All youth whose mental health screening indicates the need for an assessment shall be seen by a qualified mental health professional within 24 hours of admission.

2. Medical Screening/Addiction Screening

1. The screening shall include:

a) inquiry into current and past illnesses, recent injuries, and history of medical and mental health problems and conditions, including

- (a) medical, dental, and psychiatric/mental health problems;
- (b) current medication;
- (c) allergies;
- (d) use of drugs or alcohol, including types, methods of use, amounts, frequency, time of last use, previous history of problems after ceased use, and any recent hiding of drugs in his/her body;
- (e) recent injuries (e.g. at or near the time of arrest);
- (f) pregnancy status; and
- (g) names and contact information for physicians and clinics treating youth in the community.

2. During this screening, staff shall observe:

- a) behavior and appearance, indications of alcohol or drug intoxication, state of consciousness, and sweating;
- b) indications of possible disabilities to include but not limited to vision, hearing, intellectual disabilities and mobility limitations;
- c) conditions of skin, bruises, lesions, yellow skin, rash, swelling, and needle marks or other indications of drug use or physical abuse; and
- d) tattoos and piercings.

3. After the screening, staff shall refer the following youth for needed services:

- a) youth who are identified in the screening as requiring additional medical services shall be referred and receive an expedited medical follow-up within 24 hours or sooner if medically necessary;
- b) when a youth shows evidence or alleges abuse or neglect by a parent, guardian, or relative, a staff member shall immediately contact law enforcement and DCFS. In situations where a youth shows evidence of or alleges abuse by law enforcement officials, the parish district attorney's office shall be notified.
- c) Youth who are identified in the screening as struggling with substance abuse shall be referred to services or treatment within 48-hours of screening or disclosure.

### 3. Human Trafficking Screening

- 1. The provider shall use a standardized, validated human trafficking screening tool to identify youth who may be at risk (or currently involved in) of human trafficking or require prompt victim services. Provider will ensure that persons administering the human trafficking screening tool are trained/retrained in its administration and the use of its scores, as recommended by the author of the screening tool if more frequently than annually.
- 2. All youth whose human trafficking screening indicates that they are an alleged victim of human trafficking should be referred to services within 72 hours of screening or disclosure and adhere to mandatory reporting procedures involving involving alleged child victims of sex trafficking, per CHC 610
- 3. All staff who administer initial and subsequent screenings for human trafficking at local licensed detention and secure care facilities will be required to receive comprehensive training in the proper administration of such tools, up to and exceeding the recommendations from the creators of said tools, and to provide evidence to indicate completion of said training to maintain employment.
- 4. There may be costs to consider with this proposal regarding training the facilities.

## Recommendation 2: **Alternatives Means of Victim Testimony**

### Overview:

The subcommittee recommends amending RS 15:283(E) to allow victims of human trafficking under the age of 21 years the right to testify by CCTV or other alternative means, in lieu of in-court testimony.

### Background:

Louisiana Revised Statute 15:283 currently provides a “protected person” with alternative means to testify in lieu of live, in-court testimonies. This privilege, however, is limited to individuals under the age of 17 or individuals with a developmental disability who is a victim or witness to a crime. Children who are 17 do not have this privilege. Further, Louisiana law in RS 14:46.2(A)(1)(b) has recognized additional protections for youth victims of human trafficking

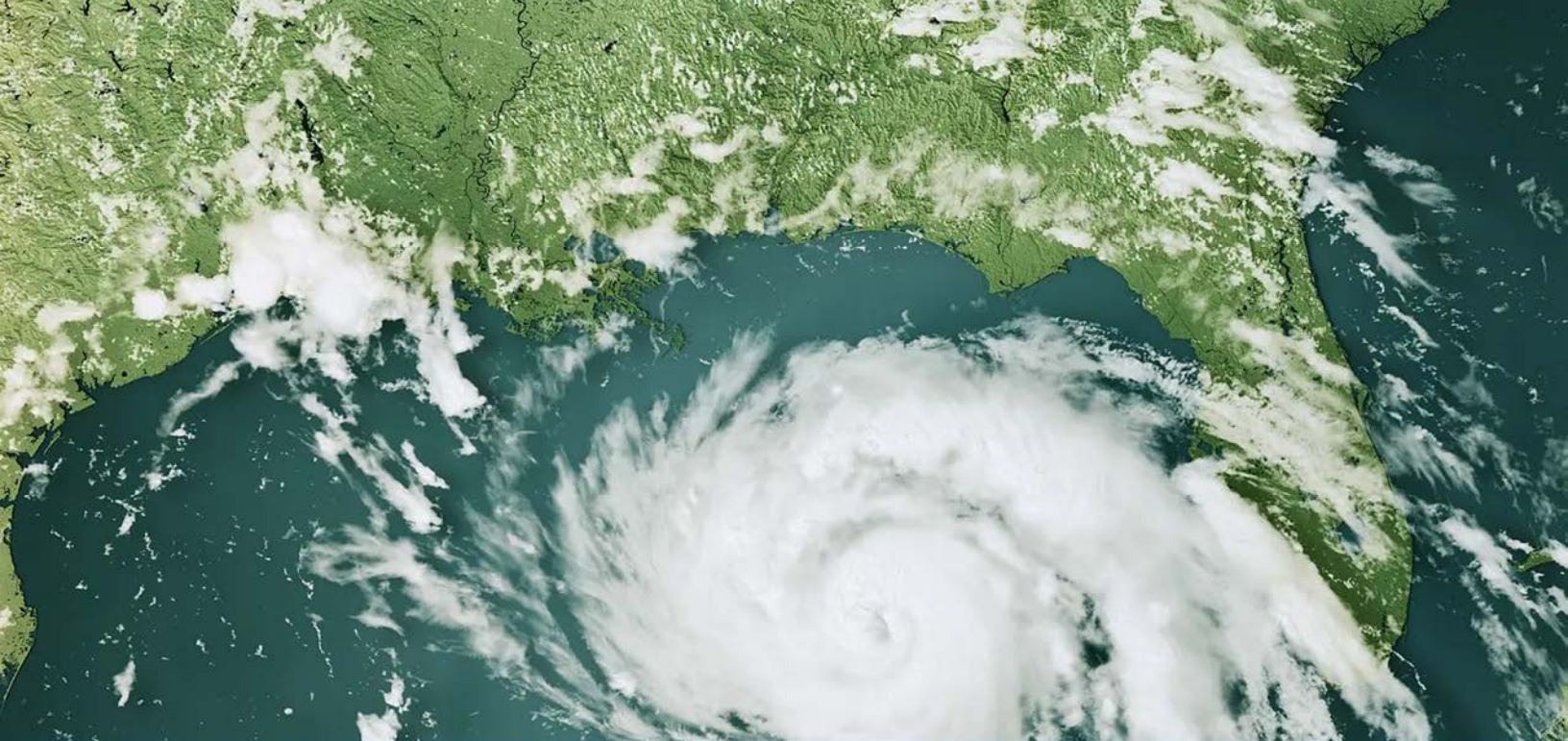
under the age of 21. As a result, RS 15: 283 should be amended to allow alternative means of testifying for victims of human trafficking 21 years of age and under. Shared Hope International identified this issue– failure to provide alternative means of testifying to victims– as a major gap in Louisiana’s victim-centered criminal justice response, receiving a grade of F for legislation in this category. Victim testimony is critical to securing a successful prosecution at trial, yet the process is highly traumatizing to victims. Allowing child and youth victims to testify through a closed circuit television (CCTV) reduces their risk of retraumatization, is likely to enhance the accuracy of the victim’s testimony, and may even encourage victim cooperation if it means they do not need to confront their abuser in-person. Further, this recommendation extends to under the age of 21 and makes Louisiana law more consistent with our current understanding of children and youth victims of human trafficking, who are particularly vulnerable to experiencing long-term development, psychological, and physical impacts of their trauma and abuse. This recommendation will make the act of testifying for our children and youth victims more victim-centered and limit potential retraumatization from these protected persons.

Recommendations:

RS 15:283(E) should be amended and include the following language, as indicated below:

E. For the purposes of this Section, "protected person" means a person who is the victim of a crime or a witness in a criminal prosecution who is either of the following:

- (1) Under the age of seventeen years.
- (2) Has a developmental disability as defined in R.S. 28:451.2(12).
- (3) Victims of human trafficking under the age of twenty-one years, as defined in RS 14:46.2 and 14:46.3.



# Advancing the field: Human trafficking and natural disasters

## Recommendations for the Louisiana Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board

Prepared for

**Louisiana Human Trafficking Prevention  
Commission and Advisory Board**

C/O Louisiana Governor's Office of Human  
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## Overview

Natural disasters can cause long-lasting, catastrophic damage and trauma to people and their families, homes, and communities. Flooded roads, downed powerlines and trees, evacuations, and reduced access to crucial resources can leave survivors isolated and/or homeless as responders attempt to restore safe conditions and provide aid. These unstable environments may incentivize predatory behavior as those impacted by disasters may engage in risky survival strategies, increasing the pool of potential human trafficking victims.

There's increasing discussion and understanding of the risks of both human trafficking and of natural disasters in the United States, but very little discussion of the intersection. What little research does exist focuses on response in the international space in developing countries. To address this gap, RTI International conducted a study aiming to fill this gap through an exploration of disaster relief and human trafficking response personnel experiences within the context of disaster-prone areas like Louisiana. From this study, RTI developed this report to share recommendations for Louisiana-based responders to improve response to trafficking after natural disasters.

## Research project

To better understand the nexus between human trafficking and disasters, researchers from RTI International conducted a series of interviews with disaster responders and social service providers. These interviews explored local experiences and knowledge about the intersection of human trafficking and hurricanes. RTI conducted 31 semi-structured qualitative group and individual interviews with key stakeholder organizations responding to human trafficking cases and/or natural disasters in Louisiana. There were 46 individuals who participated in interviews for this study.

Data collection consisted of interviews with both anti-trafficking and disaster preparation and response professionals who work in or near areas that were impacted by these hurricanes. The interviews focused on the participant's professional background, community context, collaboration with other agencies and organizations, disaster-specific preparation and response, and how major hurricanes may have impacted the level and type of exploitation that is occurring in the community.



### Learn more

Learn more about this research project at [www.rti.org/impact/human-trafficking-wake-natural-disasters](http://www.rti.org/impact/human-trafficking-wake-natural-disasters)

## From this research, RTI has produced the following:

- Human trafficking and natural disasters scoping (literature) review (*publication in a peer-reviewed journal forthcoming*)

- Human trafficking and natural disasters case study paper (*publication in a peer-reviewed journal forthcoming*)
- Human trafficking of resilience workers paper (*forthcoming*)
- Presentation on preliminary findings to the Louisiana Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023
- Human Trafficking & Natural Disasters: Louisiana Findings: Prevention (see Appendix A)
- Human Trafficking & Natural Disasters: Louisiana Findings: Response (see Appendix B)
- Human Trafficking & Natural Disasters: Louisiana Findings: Resources (*forthcoming*)

The final product is this report, which outlines recommendations for Louisiana-based responders to improve response to trafficking after natural disasters.

## Intended application of these recommendations

This document is a compilation of research findings and recommendations for Louisiana anti-trafficking and disaster response professionals. These recommendations represent the key findings from this research that can be broadly applied in Louisiana to improve anti-trafficking response after natural disasters. Though not strictly legislative in nature, all these recommendations have potential legislative implications and opportunities. The authors of this report encourage committee chairs and members of the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Advisory Board to review this report to consider legislative changes or recommendations that could be made to advance anti-trafficking work in post-disaster settings.

## Summary of findings

**The following are the five key recommendations outlined in this report:**

1. Build partnerships between disaster response and human trafficking response organizations.
2. Increase protections for workers rebuilding after the disaster.
3. Bolster disaster resilience and disaster preparedness capacity of human trafficking responders.
4. Expand outreach and programming for children in post-disaster settings.
5. Mitigate community vulnerabilities related to homelessness and housing instability.

Though there is limited research in the peer-reviewed literature about human trafficking and natural disasters in the United States, there are experts in the field who hold knowledge that could positively impacted the field. The recommendations outlined in this report represent opportunities for growth and development that could advance anti-trafficking work in disaster contexts. Louisiana is uniquely positioned to lead on this topic because of its geography on the edge of climate change, sea rise, and increasing severity of natural disasters, and also because of the advanced worked experts responding to human trafficking in the state.



## Recommendations

Each recommendation includes background information, a quote from a respondent in the case study, and potential activities for the future to address that recommendation.

### 1. Build partnerships between disaster response and human trafficking response agencies.

Multi-disciplinary collaboration to respond to trafficking is especially important in post-disaster contexts. However, respondents believed that this collaboration must start before a major event for it to be effective in the aftermath of a storm. Interviewees noted that the rate at which their multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) reconvened following a disaster had a major impact on their ability to respond to suspected trafficking cases.

Participants also noted how important collaboration between disaster responders and human trafficking responders are. For example, after one disaster response agency identified several cases of labor trafficking, they connected with a state trafficking response office to consider ways to improve services for foreign national victims of human trafficking. This led to important policy changes and an ongoing relationship between the agencies.



"Build those relationships way before any [disasters] happen. Because if that is done, then you can do a lot of work during the difficult times."

—Human trafficking responder

### Ideas for the future

*Potential activities to address this recommendation include the following:*

- Assign dedicated personnel to investigate and respond to trafficking cases in the post storm context.
- Sign and implement Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for human trafficking multi-disciplinary collaboration.
- Build and strengthen cross-disciplinary partnerships of organizations that may encounter victims of human trafficking.
- Formally integrate anti-trafficking professionals and other violence response professionals (e.g., child abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence) into disaster response cooperative efforts.



## 2. Increase protections for workers rebuilding after the disaster.

Workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse after disasters because of enforcement challenges, isolation, and limited resources. The workers who help with rebuilding a community after a storm, known as resilience force workers, are particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation after disasters. Wage theft, withholding passports, threatening deportation, violence, and non-payment were just a few examples of the abuse that practitioners saw after Hurricanes Laura and Ida.

In Louisiana, these workers often are from Central America and South America but are generally employed by Louisianians, Texans, and Americans from other states. For example, one case currently in litigation is *Ortiguerra v. Grand Isle Shipyard*.<sup>1</sup> This class action lawsuit alleges that Filipino B-1 guestworker visa holders were brought to Galliano, Louisiana to repair oil rigs in the Gulf. They were not allowed to leave, escorted to do anything offsite, and threatened when they asked for better conditions. During Hurricane Ida, while other workers were evacuated, they were required to stay in the bunkhouse during the storm. They were compelled to do disaster resilience work and lived in unfit conditions in an abandoned bowling alley after the storm. This case represents a type of exploitation that interview participants recognized was commonplace after hurricanes.



"We had several labor trafficking cases [after Ida]... they weren't getting paid, and they didn't have any recourse because they had been threatened that they would get deported."

—Disaster responder

### Ideas for the future

*Potential activities to address this recommendation include the following:*

- Provide language accessible “know-your-rights” and worker rights training campaigns to reach both US citizens and foreign national workers.
- Partner with agencies already engaging with workers, such as worker centers and immigration rights groups, to learn more about worker rights and needs.
- Consider state-level policy changes to that increase workers’ rights, protection, and worker safety in disaster resilience work.
- Establish state guidelines that ban the use of labor trafficking on government contracts.

<sup>1</sup> *Ortiguerra v. Grand Isle Shipyard, LLC*, Civil Action 22-309 (E.D. La. Sep. 23, 2022).

### 3. Bolster disaster resilience and disaster preparedness capacity of human trafficking responders.

While not directly tied to the mission of anti-trafficking efforts, participants shared that organizational disaster preparedness efforts had a direct correlation with their relative resiliency or challenges after a natural disaster. While flexibility and adaptability were identified as critical components of success, many respondents noted that preparation in terms of formal policies and procedures were necessary to maintain anti-trafficking efforts in disaster contexts.

Participants also noted that the longer agencies took to return to work, the more that potential victims ‘fell through the cracks’ or were susceptible to human trafficking. Several participants reflected on the lack of established processes to get ‘back to work’ after the storm which led to monthslong delays resuming anti-trafficking investigations, MDTs, and outreach efforts.



“The longer it takes for agencies to get back together, the more that people can fall through the cracks.”

—Human trafficking responder

#### Ideas for the future

*Potential activities to address this recommendation include the following:*

- Establish and update disaster preparedness policies and procedures within anti-trafficking organizations.
- Review existing protocols and collaborative agreements to ensure continuity of cross-disciplinary activities after disasters.
- Provide disaster resilience and disruption mitigation training and support to anti-trafficking organizations.

## 4. Expand outreach and programming for children in post-disaster settings.

Children are highly vulnerable to human trafficking after natural disasters. Experts noted that familial trafficking can increase after natural disasters because of a variety of factors. Surprisingly, respondents primarily shared cases of familial trafficking in post-disaster settings. However, children may also be more likely to be enticed by strangers or acquaintances offering them a better living situation.

Additionally, respondents noted that children are isolated from safe places to disclose abuse in the disaster aftermath. Many shared that it was difficult for children to get support after disasters because normal outlets like schools and extracurricular activities, where they might be able to tell a safe adult what is happening to them, were no longer available.



“It was a difficult time, you know, trying to ensure kids could talk about what was happening and then reassuring them that they would be safe knowing that sometimes the abuser was in the home with them.”

—Human trafficking responder

### Ideas for the future

*Potential activities to address this recommendation include the following:*

- Increase outreach and engagement with children living in disaster-impacted communities.
- Design age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate human trafficking prevention curricula for children impacted by disasters.
- Integrate home visits and in-person engagement with children into post-disaster programming and services.
- Establish policies and procedures for locating and engaging with system-involved youth expeditiously in post-disaster settings.

## 5. Mitigate community vulnerabilities related to homelessness and housing instability in post-disaster settings.

Louisiana's natural disasters often impact housing resources after a storm. Damage and destruction of existing structures, coupled with a high number of resilience force workers entering the housing market, housing instability becomes a critical vulnerability for community members.

Traffickers may try to take advantage of impacted community members seeking shelter. Several respondents discussed cases of human trafficking that stemmed from victims being homeless and unsuspectingly turning to traffickers for help.

Additionally, employers who are abusing or trafficking workers may use employer-managed housing as a means of controlling their victims. Respondents described cases of workers living in sub-standard and unsafe living conditions and being threatened if they asked for decent living conditions.



"All of the hotels are damaged. All of the apartment complexes are heavily damaged. So those are no longer housing options."

—Disaster responder

### Ideas for the future

*Potential activities to address this recommendation include the following:*

- Consider policy changes to regulate rent prices and housing access for displaced residents after a natural disaster.
- Regulate and inspect employer-operated housing for workers, particularly those on guestworker visa programs.
- Train congregate shelter and emergency shelter staff to spot the signs of human trafficking.
- Establish a human trafficking prevention outreach campaign targeted at impacted residents and resilience workers seeking housing after natural disasters.

## Implications

One of the key findings from this research project was the incredible wealth of knowledge that Louisiana practitioners held about this disaster response. The lessons from the past, from major storms like Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, to more recent events like the 2016 floods in Baton Rouge or the ice storm in 2021, were present in all our interviews with responders. Though there is limited research in the peer-reviewed literature about human trafficking and natural disasters in the United States, there are experts in the field who hold knowledge that could positively impact the field.

The recommendations outlined in this report represent opportunities for growth and development that could advance anti-trafficking work in disaster contexts. Louisiana is uniquely positioned to lead on the topic of natural disaster response because of its geography on the edge of climate change, sea rise, and increasing severity of natural disasters. Additionally, Louisiana can lead the country in this disaster-trafficking intersection because of its robust anti-trafficking response and advanced disaster response and resilience field. Resources like the “Human Trafficking and Natural Disasters Outreach Toolkit”<sup>2</sup> are examples of the ingenuity of responders in Louisiana.

### Contact information

To learn more about this report or the broader RTI human trafficking and natural disaster project, visit the project webpage or contact the project leads, Dr. Kelle Barrick.



“The lesson learned is, to beforehand, do my homework. Study the data. Study the community... it can help you out a lot as far as with the problem solving and in helping assist those communities.”

—human trafficking responder



“I’ve been with this agency for almost 17 years now. And my goodness, even with emergency preparedness we’ve grown so much... but each year it feels like there’s something new. Right now [sic] we’re being educated and on human trafficking and that intersection between natural disasters... We need to grow and make changes so we can better keep these families safe.”

—Disaster responder

<sup>2</sup> Human Trafficking Prevention Resource Center of Louisiana, “Louisiana Natural Disasters and Human Trafficking Outreach Toolkit”, September 2022, <https://humantrafficking.la.gov/resources/disasters/>



# Appendix A: Human Trafficking & Natural Disasters: Louisiana findings. Prevention

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING & NATURAL DISASTERS: LOUISIANA FINDINGS

## PREVENTION



To better understand the nexus between human trafficking and disasters, researchers from RTI International conducted a series of interviews with disaster responders and social service providers. These interviews explored local experiences and knowledge about the intersection of human trafficking and hurricanes.

**This document is a compilation of findings, interview quotes, emergent practices from Louisiana respondents and promising practices identified in the literature at large.** This sheet focuses on key takeaways about human trafficking prevention in the wake of natural disasters.



### WORKER PROTECTION

*"We had several labor trafficking cases [after Ida]... they weren't getting paid, and they didn't have any recourse because they had been threatened that they would get deported."*

The workers who help with rebuilding a community after a storm, known as **resilience force workers**, are **highly vulnerable to labor exploitation after disasters**. In Louisiana, these workers often are from Central America and South America but are generally employed by Louisianians, Texans, and Americans from other states. Wage theft, withholding passports, threatening deportation, violence, and non-payment were just a few examples of the abuse that practitioners had seen after Hurricanes Laura and Ida.

**Ideas for the future:** Engage with resilience workers by providing "know-your-rights" training; Partner with agencies already engaging with workers to learn more about worker rights and needs; Consider policy changes to that support workers' rights and worker safety in disaster resilience work.



### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Many people do not realize that human trafficking can happen after a natural disaster. To address this gap, practitioners in this study named **community outreach and awareness activities as a critical step to prevent trafficking**. Although anyone can experience trafficking, vulnerable populations are at a greater risk and may need extra considerations or resources during outreach activities.

**Ideas for the future:** Integrate language accessibility into any outreach activities; Offer free trainings at churches, community centers, and on social media to reach a variety of audiences; establish outreach programs to engage children in disaster impacted communities.

**Promising Practice:** Check out the [Louisiana Human Trafficking and Natural Disaster Outreach Toolkit](#) for resources to share with your community members.



### LESSONS FROM THE PAST

*"The lesson learned is, to beforehand, do my homework. Study the data. Study the community... it can help you out a lot as far as with the problem solving and in helping assist those communities."*

Many practitioners shared lessons they had learned from past storms, such as Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita, that helped them improve their response during more recent hurricanes. This practice of reflecting on past storms and applying lessons learned to update policies, procedures, practices, and laws is critical to effectively responding to human trafficking following a natural disaster. Being flexible and utilizing survivor-centered approaches were just a few of the lessons practitioners shared that they had incorporated into their response for Laura and Ida.

**Ideas for the future:** Host a convening to share lessons learned and document the changes that are needed to improve trafficking response following future disasters; Engage with impacted community members and survivors to learn what they believe worked well and needs improvement in the future.



# Appendix B: Human Trafficking & Natural Disasters: Louisiana findings. Response

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING & NATURAL DISASTERS: LOUISIANA FINDINGS

## RESPONSE



To better understand the nexus between human trafficking and disasters, researchers from RTI International conducted a series of interviews with disaster responders and social service providers.

**This document is a compilation of research findings, interview quotes, emergent practices from Louisiana respondents and promising practices identified in the literature at large. It also infuses promising practices identified in the literature at large. This sheet focuses on key takeaways about human trafficking response in the wake of natural disasters.**



### FOSTER COLLABORATION

*"Build those relationships way before any [disasters] happen. Because if that is done, then you can do a lot of work during the difficult times."*

**Multi-disciplinary collaboration to respond to trafficking is especially important in post-disaster contexts.** Interviewees noted that the rate at which their multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) reconvened following a disaster had a major impact on their ability to respond to suspected trafficking cases.

**Ideas for the future:** Assign dedicated personnel at your organization to investigate and respond to trafficking cases in the post storm context; Sign and implement Memoranda of Understanding for human trafficking MDTs; Build and strengthen cross-disciplinary partnerships of organizations that may come into contact with victims of human trafficking.



### UPDATING POLICIES & PROCEDURES

**Policies and procedures are tools to assist organizations to maintain efforts in difficult conditions such as post-disaster settings.** While flexibility and adaptability were identified as critical components of success, many respondents noted that preparation in terms of formal policies and procedures were necessary to maintain anti-trafficking efforts in disaster contexts.

**Ideas for the future:** Review existing policies and protocols; Update disaster policies and procedures to ensure specific anti-trafficking efforts can be resumed immediately following a disaster.



### INCREASING HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY

*"All of the hotels are damaged. All of the apartment complex are heavily damaged. So those are no longer housing options."*

**Louisiana's natural disasters often impact housing resources after a storm.** Damage and destruction of existing structures, coupled with a high number of resilience force workers entering the housing market, housing instability becomes a critical vulnerability for community members. Traffickers may try to take advantage of impacted community members seeking shelter.

**Ideas for the future:** Consider policy changes to regulate rent prices after a storm; Regulate and inspect employer-operated housing for resilience workforce members; train congregate shelter staff to spot the signs of human trafficking.