



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
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STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WELLNESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Administration for Children and Families' activities under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA).

Trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery in which 600,000 to 800,000 people a year are trafficked across international borders and exploited for labor or commercial sex. Of that number, it is estimated that 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States each year. The TVPA initiated a comprehensive effort to combat this scourge. It provides for enhanced punishment of traffickers and the identification, protection and care of victims.

Under the TVPA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the Administration for Children and Families, is responsible for certifying persons as trafficking victims and helping them access the benefits and services they need to rebuild their lives. In this capacity, we created a nationwide network of organizations to identify victims through community outreach, provide technical assistance to service organizations and provide services to victims. Before discussing these activities, I would like to share some background on what we know about the victims of trafficking.

### Background

Trafficking victims are drawn from a plethora of nationalities, ethnic groups, and faiths. The traffickers exploit their victims for a variety of evils, including prostitution, pornography, sweatshop labor, and involuntary domestic servitude. Some live in society's direct view but are made inconspicuous by their reticence to openly interact with others. Some are held at a single location, where they work and live under lock and

key. Others live in one location and work in another. Their captors ferry them between the two and limit or completely preclude their access to the outside world. Still others live with their captors and have limited and controlled access to the outside world. Some are paid a small wage, some are paid nothing, and still others are told that their earnings are to work off their passage to the United States.

Nonetheless, the methods of the captors and the vulnerabilities of their victims produce certain frequently recurring characteristics. Traffickers in the United States imbue their victims with incorrect, but believable, stories of their legal vulnerabilities. Traffickers tell victims that they are illegal immigrants and therefore criminals who will be arrested and deported or imprisoned if they approach law enforcement agents. Traffickers threaten their victims and their families, both here and in their home countries, with physical harm, embarrassment, and legal action. As a result, when victims do come in contact with law enforcement and judicial personnel, health providers and other people who would be in a position to assist them, the victims tend to adhere to the coaching of their captors and do not alert such persons of their plight.

### Certification and Services

The Department has developed a systematic approach to the certification of trafficking victims and the facilitation of their access to benefits and services. Under the TVPA, HHS is the agency responsible for issuing the certification document verifying that an individual is a victim of trafficking eligible for federally funded or administered benefits and services to the same extent as a refugee.

We consult regularly with staff at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Justice, the agencies that investigate -- and in the case of the Department of Justice, prosecute -- trafficking cases, and refer appropriate cases to HHS for certification. We also coordinate with U.S. Attorneys' Offices around the country on trafficking cases as well as other federal law enforcement officials from the Department of Labor and the Department of Homeland Security.

Once a referral is received, we must ensure that the victim has met criteria required by the Act in order to be certified. If the appropriate criteria are met, then a certification letter in the case of adults or an eligibility letter in the case of minors will be provided to victims safely and without breaches of confidentiality. We then contact grantees of local refugee services providers and other benefit-granting agencies to inquire about appropriate local programs to help the victims. Many victims are in need of psychological counseling, medical assistance and legal referrals.

We strongly encourage the participation of certified trafficking victims in existing assistance programs for refugees -- primarily the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program and the Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance Program. The goal of the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program is to help refugees attain self-sufficiency within four months of eligibility without accessing public assistance. The Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance Program provides temporary cash and medical assistance for up to eight months from the date of certification. This program is designed to provide assistance to those refugees who are not eligible for other federal benefits.

The trafficking program also has established a mechanism for serving minor victims of trafficking through the Department's Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program. That program tailors the placement of and services to minors to meet their cultural, educational, health and security needs. The Department operates the URM program through grants with the Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Further, we work with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Department of Homeland Security to coordinate access to Employment Authorization Documents. The document is critical because it permits eligible victims to work, which in turn, leads to self-sufficiency.

### Outreach

Outreach is clearly critical to our efforts to help trafficking victims. As HHS' Assistant Secretary for Children and Families Wade F. Horn recently said, "It is unlikely that victims of trafficking will be found and rescued in significant numbers until the American public gains a much greater awareness of the horror of human trafficking." In fact, through FY 2003, HHS issued letters of certification or eligibility to 448 victims compared with the estimated tens of thousands of victims trafficked into this country during that period.

In response to this surprisingly low victim identification rate, Secretary Tommy G. Thompson and Assistant Secretary Wade F. Horn initiated a professional public awareness campaign, The Campaign to Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking (the "Campaign"). The Campaign is designed to overcome the barriers the

federal government has experienced in identifying and rescuing victims – barriers that keep victims well-hidden from society’s view even as they live among us.

The Campaign message is a call to action for people to *Look Beneath the Surface*, as the Campaign posters implore, of people they encounter and to call the HHS trafficking information and referral hotline to report possible trafficking situations. The Campaign has developed posters, brochures, fact sheets, educational materials and a trafficking website.

The Rescue and Restore Campaign also is employing a coalition effort that targets intermediaries – defined as those who are most likely to know or come in contact with victims. Examples of intermediaries include law enforcement, healthcare and social-service providers, faith and civic groups, and other groups that conduct outreach to populations vulnerable to trafficking. The Campaign is building this coalition nationally and locally through an intensive city-by-city effort. To date, the Campaign ---with participation from the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, law enforcement agencies, faith communities and non-governmental organizations -- has announced local coalitions in Atlanta, Philadelphia, Phoenix and Tampa. It will announce additional coalitions later this year. Coalition members are asked to use their communications mechanisms to distribute the campaign message and materials.

### Hotline

As a critical complement to the Campaign, the Department has established a nationwide toll-free Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline (the “Hotline”). The Hotline operator is the Covenant House Nineline for youth in distress. The Hotline

provides victims immediate crisis counseling and referrals to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It facilitates the establishment of an essential NGO-victim relationship, enabling victims to get accurate information about their options and giving them the confidence to cooperate fully with federal law enforcement in the prosecution of traffickers.

The Hotline operates 24-hours-per-day, seven-days-a-week. Throughout each call, callers remain connected with a “live” person and can receive help in a wide variety of languages. Victims and those calling on their behalf are referred to an organization in their immediate area that is trained to serve trafficking victims. If a caller is prepared to report a case of trafficking, referral to the Department of Justice Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force is made immediately.

Between April 1 and June 15, the Hotline handled 563 calls from concerned citizens, social service providers and potential victims of trafficking. Calls to the Hotline increased by more than 60 percent between April and May. In that same timeframe, calls for general information increased by more than 55 percent and referrals to NGOs and various federal agencies including the Department of Justice and the Department of Labor increased by more than 65 percent.

### Conclusion

In closing Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for bringing greater attention to this important issue. The TVPA gave a name to an age-old problem, and created a federal response to this terrible assault on human dignity. We have worked diligently to provide services to trafficking victims as well as to develop outreach activities and a hotline to

provide a broad reach to many more victims. I look forward to working with you and the Congress as we advance toward our goal of substantially increasing the rate at which the federal government identifies and assists victims. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.