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FEATURED TOP STORY

## Kansas attorney general, two trucking associations partner to combat sex trafficking

By Steve Fry The Topeka Capital-Journal Apr 7, 2016



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TOPEKA — On Thursday, a searing symbol of the brutality of sex trafficking was on display when the Kansas attorney general and two professional trucking associations announced a program to fight sex trafficking on Kansas highways.

A brass dog tag that a sex trafficking victim was forced to wear after her pimp sold her to a brothel in Nevada was on display in the Freedom Drivers Project, a mobile exhibit sponsored by Truckers Against Trafficking to educate people about human trafficking.

The dog tag reads, “Crib No. 3. Ask for” and the victim’s name.

For weeks at a time, the girl’s pimp sold her to a legal brothel in Nevada, and the pimp received 60 percent of the girl’s profits while the brothel received 40 percent, the information plate under the dog tag said.

On Thursday, Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt, the Kansas Motor Carriers Association, and Truckers Against Trafficking discussed a partnership to fight sex trafficking and to support trafficking victims.

The program focuses on monitoring Kansas highways where some sex trafficking occurs, Schmidt said.

In 2009, the attorney general’s office helped two sex trafficking victims, and in 2015, the number had climbed to more than 400.

Tom Whitaker, motor carriers executive director, said observant truck drivers are the “eyes and ears of law enforcement on the road.” Law enforcement officers do 50,000 roadside safety inspections a year, creating a lot of trucker-law enforcement interaction, Whitaker said. Police and truckers have a good relationship, he said.

In Florida, a truck driver pulled into a rest area, noticed a recreational vehicle with a line of men entering and leaving, and reported the suspicious activities, Whitaker said.

Two men were convicted and sentenced to mandatory 15-year prison terms tied to sex trafficking.

Esther Goetsch, coalition build specialist with Truckers Against Trafficking, said that group was “very pleased” to partner with the attorney general’s office and the motor carriers association to close loopholes to sex traffickers.

“Truckers and truck stop employees are in a strategic position to report crimes as they are taking place and can help law enforcement in recovering victims and having traffickers arrested,” Goetsch said.

Goetsch said red flags to spot a trafficking victim include:

- Tattoos, called “branding,” on the victim’s neck or back to mark who he or she belongs to.
- Victim looks fearful and hangs head.
- Victim is unable to identify where he or she is.

Schmidt said if you think you have spotted a trafficking victim, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at (888) 373-7888 to report it.

Calls placed from Kansas are channeled to any applicable federal, local or Kansas law enforcement agencies.

Goetsch said that 1,300 calls were made nationwide to that number in 2015, identifying 415 likely cases of sex trafficking involving 723 victims, including 241 minors.

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