

NEWS, POLITICAL

# BESHEAR: HUMAN TRAFFICKING ONE OF NATION'S FASTEST GROWING CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

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*Andy Beshear*

Attorney General Andy Beshear today joined the Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT), the Kentucky Baptist Convention, the Kentucky Hotel and Travel Industry, Free 2 Hope, the Kentucky Trucking Association, WDRB and Catholic Charities of Louisville to raise awareness about one of the nation's fastest growing criminal enterprises – human trafficking.

The 11th of each January is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. January is National Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

Over the last year, Beshear has established the Kentucky Attorney General's office as the leading agency fighting human trafficking, a modern-day form of slavery in which adults and children are forced into sex or labor services.

“Human trafficking represents the worst form of abuse, often to children, and it is increasing in Kentucky,” Beshear said. “That’s why my office is partnering with the public and private sector to enhance and improve policy measures and training opportunities to increase resources and awareness to help end human trafficking.”

Beshear's office receives direct complaint information on possible human trafficking from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

In just the last quarter of 2016, Beshear's office provided assistance on 14 possible incidences of human trafficking and acted as the sole investigative agency on five cases.

For 2016 as a whole, the AG's Department of Criminal Investigations provided technical assistance to local law enforcement agencies on 32 possible human trafficking cases, resulting in the identification of two minors who were being trafficked for sex.

The office was selected by the United States Department of Justice as the first Kentucky government agency to receive a federal human trafficking grant, and has forged partnerships with the trucking and hospitality industries, and the Baptist Convention.

"As the largest denomination in the Commonwealth, the Kentucky Baptist Convention feels a special burden to stand with the attorney general to prevent human trafficking and rescue those individuals whose lives are systematically and cruelly devastated," said Hershael W. York, chairman of the Kentucky Baptist Convention Public Affairs Committee and pastor at Buck Run Baptist Church of Frankfort. "The resulting devaluation of human life and the loss of human dignity is an attack on all of us. Victims of human trafficking are surely emblematic of Jesus' concern for 'the least of these' and so we must accept the mandate of protection, deliverance and justice."

"Professional drivers have proven time and again that they are the eyes and ears of our nation's roadways," said Truckers Against Trafficking Executive Director Kendis Paris. "They are in places and see things that most of us do not. If we can train every CDL holder in America to recognize and report human trafficking as they're seeing it, many more victims will be recovered out of a life of forced prostitution. Truckers Against Trafficking is extremely grateful to be partnering with the Kentucky Attorney General's office and the Kentucky Trucking Association to reach this critical goal, and we applaud both groups for being leaders on this issue."

"The Kentucky Trucking Association, our members and the trucking community in this state and around the country pledge our support to Truckers Against Trafficking and its mission," Guy Young, president and CEO of the Kentucky Trucking Association. "Our thanks to Attorney General Beshear for his leadership on this important issue. We are hopeful that the public-private partnerships formed in Kentucky to fight human trafficking will continue to make a difference in this human tragedy. Awareness and training for our professional drivers has led to increased reporting of suspected activity, rescue of many victims, and the arrest and prosecution of those responsible. We are glad to extend our help to TAT in any way we can."

"Kentucky's tourism industry is fully prepared to help inform and educate our businesses and employees about human trafficking," said Hank Phillips, president and CEO of the Kentucky Travel Industry Association. "This activity is so despicable, that there can be a temptation to ignore it and pretend it does not exist. We cannot do that and we will not do that."

“Human trafficking is a crime that is hidden in the seams of Kentucky communities, in rural and urban areas,” said Marissa Castellanos, human trafficking program director for Catholic Charities of Louisville. “Workers are being abused and enslaved in horrific conditions on farms, in restaurants, in domestic work, and other Kentucky businesses. Men, women, and children are being exploited for commercial sex, forced to engage in sex acts, resulting in thousands of dollars in profits for traffickers. Survivors need supportive services in order to regain control of their lives and begin healing. Catholic Charities is committed to helping victims of human trafficking with case management services, basic needs, immigration relief, advocacy, and other services. We hope Kentuckians will continue to raise their awareness of this issue, and look for ways to engage as more conscious consumers and by reporting potential trafficking activities to law enforcement.”

Human trafficking victims are often the most marginalized in society – victims of abuse and violence, runaways, refugees and immigrants, Beshear said.

“They are coerced into submission by their abusers through many immoral means, including forced dependence on drugs, violence, threats and manipulation,” Beshear said. “And the problem is getting worse.”

Human trafficking reports to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services have grown by 50 percent each year, climbing from 51 victims in 2013 to 169 reported cases for 2015.

Beshear said his office is working with state and federal partners to fill these gaps in several different ways.

“We are getting real time case information from state and federal agencies, and reaching out to local law enforcement, prosecutors and social workers,” he said. “We’re offering support for investigations, victims services referrals, legal research, specialized training and prosecution assistance.”

Beshear recognized WDRB Television in Louisville for producing the human trafficking awareness video that will be shown to train the employees of each participating hotel, convention center and others from the tourism industry.

The Kentucky Human Trafficking Task Force will meet on Wednesday to discuss plans to use the federal grant to hire a specially trained human trafficking investigator, enhance the collaborative efforts of the task force to ensure victim-centered response, investigation, prosecution and follow up services in cases of human trafficking. The grant will also allow the task force and AG’s office to better collect data on human trafficking.

To learn more about human trafficking and efforts to fight it, visit Catholic Charities of Louisville Rescue and Restore program website at <http://www.rescueandrestoreky.org>, or contact the Attorney General's Office of Child Abuse and Exploitation Prevention at 502-696-5300. The national hotline is 888-373-7888.

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