



Truckers Against Trafficking parked outside the Capitol Annex Wednesday showing their support for human trafficking awareness. (Photo by Brad Bowman/brad. bowman@state-journal.com)



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Human trafficking on rise in Kentucky

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According to state officials, human trafficking reports have increased by 50 percent since 2013. On Wednesday, Attorney General Andy Beshear joined stakeholders like Truckers Against Trafficking, Kentucky Trucking Association and the Kentucky Baptist Convention in the Capitol Rotunda to raise awareness about what they called the fastest-growing criminal enterprise in the state.

While state officials estimate the human trafficking business generates more than \$150 billion each year, only 10 percent of suspected cases result in an investigation.

Human trafficking reports to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services have increased from 51 victims in 2013 to 169 in 2015, a more than 300 percent increase.

Beshear has spearheaded human trafficking investigations through his office by providing technical assistance to authorities on 32 human trafficking cases, assistance on 14 suspected cases of human trafficking in the last quarter of 2016 and acting as the sole investigating agency on five cases.

Last year, Beshear announced Kentucky was one of five states receiving a federal grant to combat human trafficking with new solutions. The U.S. Department of Justice selected Beshear's office for the \$1.5 million grant.

Wednesday, the Kentucky Human Trafficking Task Force's agenda included discussing plans for using the grant to hire a trained human trafficking investigator, enhancing efforts of the task force for victim-centered response and follow-up victim services, and prosecuting and investigating human trafficking with improved data collection.

One of the biggest misconceptions about human trafficking, Beshear said Wednesday, is that it doesn't happen in just the metro areas of the state.

"The major misconceptions about human trafficking are first that it doesn't happen in a certain area. Human trafficking is in every county and every city in this commonwealth," Beshear said. "It's perpetrated on large scale, but it's also perpetrated by that foster dad who sold his foster daughter's body for furniture. The second (misconception) is that people mistake prostitution for human trafficking. There is no such thing as a child prostitute in the commonwealth of Kentucky. While there might be more in more populated areas, it has to be recognized and addressed in every single place. It's happening in your readers' movie theaters; it's happening in their restaurants and communities."

Beshear said those misconceptions "that it isn't happening here" must be broken down, and through training initiated through his office and partnerships with the hospitality industry, the Kentucky Baptist Association and Truckers Against Trafficking, victims will receive the help they need.

"Professional drivers have proven time and again that they are the eyes and ears of our nation's roadways," said Kendis Paris, executive director of Truckers Against Trafficking. "They are in places and see things 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.”

In 2015, Franklin County had one human trafficking case. Donna Jackson, chair of the Franklin County Human Trafficking Task Force, told The State Journal last year that human trafficking cases usually result in charges related to drugs or prostitution. Human trafficking happens in Franklin County, Jackson said, from online sex trafficking websites and possibly in local restaurants where employees work long hours without the liberty to move around town freely as they choose before getting moved to another location in another state.

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