

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State of Illinois Combats Human Trafficking and Supports Survivors

January – Human Trafficking Awareness Month

SPRINGFIELD – Today, the State of Illinois is recognizing Human Trafficking Awareness Day, part of the larger Human Trafficking Awareness Month, in an effort to raise awareness about one of the most under-reported and under-identified crimes. Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to control another person for labor or commercial sex act purposes. Every year millions of men, women, and children are trafficked worldwide, including in the United States and in Illinois.

“Here in Illinois, we are fighting to lift up our most vulnerable and protect all who are at risk of human trafficking,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “As we recognize Human Trafficking Awareness Month, it is crucial for all of us to learn the warning signs of human trafficking and continue to prevent this heinous crime from impacting our communities. The State of Illinois will continue our work alongside our community partners to support investigations, uplift resources for survivors, and create a safer Illinois for all.”

Signs a person is being subjected to human trafficking may include:

- Disconnected from family, friends, community organization, or houses of worship
- A sudden or dramatic change in behavior
- Being disoriented or confused, or signs of mental or physical abuse
- Youth engaged in commercial sex acts
- Child has stopped attending school
- Fearful, timid, or submissive behavior
- Indications the person is being denied food, water, sleep, or medical care
- Defers to someone they are with or appear to be controlled by another person
- No freedom of movement – where they live or where they go
- Unsuitable or unstable living conditions

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) continues to partner with local law enforcement, Illinois State Police, FBI, Attorney General’s Office, as well as partners on the prevention, education, and awareness of human trafficking. Training for those working in congregate care is also provided, so that as many people as possible can be aware of the “red flags” that could be leading a youth into human trafficking.

“It is imperative that all of us, whether you are a teacher, parent, case worker, know the signs of human trafficking,” **said Illinois DCFS Director Marc D. Smith**. “Illinois DCFS is deeply committed to educating and training our staff and partners to ensure that people are aware that this horrible crime can happen in your neighborhood.”

In 2022, the Illinois State Police (ISP) created the Trafficking Enforcement Bureau to combat the manipulation and exploitation of children and adults. In 2023, through Demand Suppression Operations, ISP investigations resulted in the arrest of 23 suspects attempting to engage in commercial sex acts with minors in areas throughout the state. ISP has also conducted investigations resulting in the arrest of suspected human traffickers and conducted human trafficking Victim Rescue Operations aimed at providing services to victims of human trafficking. ISP is planning at least one human trafficking operation each month this year.

“ISP is increasing its focus on trafficking, human trafficking as well and gun and drug trafficking, which often intersect,” **said ISP Director Brendan F. Kelly**. “ISP human trafficking operations in 2023 resulted in numerous felony charges, including Indecent Solicitation of a Child, Grooming, and Traveling to Meet a Minor. We are in the process of training all ISP officers to recognize the behaviors and indications of child and human trafficking while on routine patrol and during complex criminal investigations.”

ISP has trained or facilitated training for more than 1,000 officers and agents in human trafficking awareness and advanced investigative techniques related to human trafficking investigations. ISP continues to develop and support victim-centered human trafficking investigations.

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has offered and sponsors trainings on supporting survivors of human trafficking, including a conference, developing curriculum for the hospitality industry in partnership with State experts in human trafficking, and providing grant funding to a statewide network of domestic and sexual violence survivors services. Additionally, IDHS’s Victims of Trafficking, Torture, and Other Serious Crimes program is an integral part of the State’s safety net. IDHS and its providers work directly with individuals and their family members to identify if they may be eligible for State-funded monetary and nutritional assistance.

IDHS co-leads a joint human trafficking workgroup which is helping to ensure that there is a systemic response to the issue. One of the core goals of the joint workgroup is to ensure trauma-informed, survivor-centered support is available and easily accessible across the state.

“IDHS recognizes the importance of strengthening prevention and public education efforts and of creating a safety net for survivors. We will continue to work with the Illinois State Police, State and local organizations, and experts in the field through the joint human trafficking workgroup to identify gaps in existing services, champion needed policy changes, and to improve Illinois’ response to human trafficking,” **said IDHS Division of Family and Community Services Director Tim Verry.**

Resources:

The public is encouraged to contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline if they suspect human trafficking.

- www.humantraffickinghotline.org
- 1-888-373-7888
- *Text: 233733

OR:

- ISP.Crime.Tips@illinois.gov

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