



# House Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence Committee: Human Trafficking in Texas

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*The mission of the Department of Family and Protective Services is to protect children, the elderly, and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by involving clients, families, and communities.*

# Texas Human Trafficking Statistics

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- Texas is home to the I-10 Corridor, the number one route for human trafficking in the U.S. Houston, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio are major hubs.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice

- One in every 5 victims of human trafficking in the United States travels through Texas along the I-10 corridor.

Source: Office of the Texas Attorney General 2012

- On a typical weekend night in Texas, an estimated 188 girls under 18 are commercially sexually exploited through internet classified sex ads.

- The average age of entry into the world of commercial sexual exploitation is 12-14 years old.

- Average of 48 hours before a runaway is first approached to enter into commercial sexual exploitation.

Source: Shared Hope International

## **Texas Human Trafficking Task Force**

- Established by the 83rd Legislature in 2013, the task force developed a standardized training for education and medical professionals to help identify trafficked victims and those vulnerable to being trafficked.
  - CPS, with input from non-profit Children at Risk and the Task Force, developed such a training for DFPS staff.
  - Youth conferences allow CPS to reach out to current foster children about “Traps of a Trafficker”.
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- Law Enforcement
  - Interdiction for the Protection of Children is a program through the Texas Department of Public Safety that trains patrol officers on identifying endangered children and runaways (including foster youth).
- The Judiciary
  - A child sex trafficking victim often lands in court for criminal charges, related or unrelated to their victimization. The Texas Center for the Judiciary has created training for judges and court personnel.
  - Create specialized court programs for this population.
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
  - In addition to notifying the courts and law enforcement when a foster child runs away, CPS notifies NCMEC so they can create and disseminate a profile of the child.

# Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (HR 4980)

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- Develop policies, procedures, caseworker training to identify, document and get services for children.
- Implement protocols to locate children missing from foster care.
- Determine factors that lead to child leaving foster care and address those.

If a child in DFPS conservatorship cannot be located, CPS caseworker must:

- Notify law enforcement and other appropriate parties **within 24 hours** of absence from care;
- Notify the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children;
- Maintain contact with law enforcement to put missing children on the National Crime Information System (NCIC), a database available to all law enforcement and continue efforts to locate the child for as long as the child is missing;
- Enlist the help of a CPS Special Investigator.

# Identifying Victims of Sex Trafficking

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- DFPS released a protocol for its Special Investigators regarding children absent from foster care.
  - With law enforcement cooperation, the Special Investigator should conduct an interview with the recovered child and the person(s) who had been harboring the child.
  - The interviews should consist of questions to determine:
    - If any child abuse and/or neglect occurred while the child was missing;
    - Any indicators of human trafficking activities;
    - Other experiences of the child while absent from care; and
    - The reasons why the child ran away from care.”
  - Planned IT change to IMPACT computer system to be able to track and report the number of trafficking cases that are encountered while the child is in our care.
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- DFPS Residential Child Care Licensing has established policy changes to ensure that shelters and staff serving trafficking victims are better trained to provide unique treatment and services to victims.
- New minimum standards for these shelters went into effect December 2014.
- Additional rules were adopted in March 2014 to ensure that the location of a shelter for trafficking victims and information on the victims served is confidential.

## Emergency placements for trafficked children

- Alamo Youth Center – plan for “one stop shop” in the works in San Antonio. Not yet started.
- Refuge Ranch –(Bastrop) - 0-90 days.

## Long-term placements

- Freedom Place (Houston area) – 30 beds, 6 horses, 2 dogs. Six to 18 months as victims receive counseling, animal therapy, shelter, food, and other services. Does not accept emergency placements. Minor must want to be there.
  - Letot Girls’ Residential Therapy Center- (Dallas) . No CPS; only Juvenile referrals.
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