

**Florida Anti-Trafficking Task Forces & Coalitions Meeting  
May 5-6, 2022**

**FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights**

## **Preface & Acknowledgments**

On May 5-6, 2022, representatives from Florida’s Anti-trafficking Task Forces and Coalitions gathered together in person for the first time ever in Orlando, Florida in a meeting convened by the **Florida State University Center for the Advancement of Human Rights**,

A special debt of gratitude is owed to the **Smith Brothers Family Foundation** whose generosity made this first-of-its-kind meeting possible. Their vision for and active support of Florida’s anti-trafficking mission is an optimal example of a private-public partnership.

The observations and recommendations included in this Report do not reflect any endorsement by the Report’s authors or by any of the state agencies involved in the meeting. They are rather a record of the observations and suggestions made at the meeting by service-providers and law enforcement whose views are informed by their professional work in the anti-trafficking field.

## Overview

Florida has long been recognized as a leader in combating human trafficking. It was one of the first three U.S. states to criminalize human trafficking under its state laws, doing so in 2004. It was also among the first generation of U.S. states to enact a “Safe Harbor” law, mandating that children found to be engaged in commercial sex no longer be arrested but instead be placed in the Florida dependency system. Florida was also the first state in the U.S. to establish a Statewide Council on Human Trafficking. It did so with legislation in 2014, convening heads of state agencies to coordinate Florida’s anti-trafficking measures and policy on a quarterly basis.

Florida in the last two decades has also witnessed the emergence of regional anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions that bring together local law enforcement, prosecutors, and service providers in order to better investigate human trafficking cases and care for trafficking survivors. In 2014 the Florida Legislature formalized this trend, directing that DCF, DJJ, and law enforcement agencies participate in the coordination of these local responses.

To date, over 16 of these regional anti-trafficking groups are active in Florida. Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody has underscored the importance of these collaborative efforts, and in her first year of office charged each group with reporting on their makeup and activities to the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking that she leads.

Recent years have seen the development of important innovations and promising practices on the part of Florida’s anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions. However, Florida’s sheer size—and the onset of Covid—meant that there have been few opportunities for interaction or joint efforts on the part of increasingly skilled state law enforcement and service providers. Advocates and law enforcement alike have had the experience of working in “silos,” aware that progress was being made throughout the state but lacking structured means to collaborate with fellow task forces and coalitions. At the suggestion of the Florida State University Center for the Advancement of Human Rights, the Smith Brothers Family Foundation provided the resources to convene for the first time ever a meeting of representatives from all of Florida’s regional anti-trafficking partnerships. Each regional partnership was asked to nominate a seasoned law enforcement representative and service provider to attend and present at the gathering.

The two-day gathering had four objectives:

- (1) Provide an opportunity for Florida’s anti-trafficking advocates to meet one another and explore opportunities and mechanisms for ongoing collaboration**
- (2) Identify promising practices being developed by the service provider and law enforcement members of Florida’s anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions**
- (3) Identify current human trafficking trends in Florida**
- (4) Solicit recommendations for policy and legislative changes in Florida that will enhance victim care or the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases**

Day One of the meeting consisted of reports from each of Florida’s task forces and coalitions regarding innovations and promising practices they are developing. Groups likewise noted trafficking trends in their respective jurisdictions. On Day Two, law enforcement and service provider representatives met separately to identify and discuss challenges each group faces and to make recommendations for policy and legislative change in Florida. Staff from the FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights took notes and summarized the discussions of both days. In order that participants might share more freely, it was agreed from the outset that all comments would be recorded without attribution.

Common to each of Florida’s regional anti-trafficking partnerships is collaboration between law enforcement and service providers.<sup>1</sup> This is the hallmark of the U.S. anti-trafficking response, reflecting the foundational reality that neither group alone can root out human trafficking. The collaborative nature of the U.S. and Florida response to trafficking itself comprises a “best practice” that is increasingly emulated worldwide.

Florida has likewise benefited from the increasing participation of state agencies that bring highly specialized skillsets to Florida’s anti-trafficking efforts. Chief among these is the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), designated by the Florida Legislature as the state’s lead agency in combating child trafficking. For its part, The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) leads law enforcement and prosecutorial efforts in Florida and serves as the convener of the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking. The Office of the Statewide Prosecutor under the Office of the Attorney General likewise has a crucial role in investigating and prosecuting human trafficking cases that extend beyond a single judicial circuit. Representatives from both DCF and OAG presented to the meeting participants regarding their agency missions and their resources that are available to assist Florida’s task forces and coalitions.

Meeting participants also heard presentations from a variety of non-governmental organizations that play important roles in supporting Florida’s anti-trafficking mission. These groups included:

- Open Doors
- The International Rescue Committee
- The Florida Network of Child and Family Services
- Called2Rescue/Search4Missing

Finally, both **Attorney General Ashley Moody** and **Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez** personally addressed the meeting participants, reflecting the very high level of governmental support given to Florida anti-trafficking efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> A slight exception to this trend is the existence of two groups in Miami-Dade County—one made up of law enforcement and the other made up primarily of service providers. The two groups, however, work closely with one another.

## Meeting Participants

Name	Agency
1. Sue Aboul-hosn	Florida Department of Children and Families
2. Vania Aguilar	FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights
3. Elizabeth Albrizio	Office of the Attorney General
4. Lori Allen	Gulf Coast Sexual Assault Program Circuit 14 Human Trafficking Task Force
5. Marina Anderson	Florida Department of Children and Families
6. Kristina Bailey	International Rescue Committee
7. Elizabeth L. Bascom	Tallahassee Police Department Big Bend Coalition Against Human Trafficking
8. Robyn Metcalf Blank	Voices for Florida Open Doors Outreach Network
9. Crystal Blanton	Ocala Police Department Marion County human trafficking task force
10. Todd Bunnenberg	Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force
11. Amy Burnette	Bay County Sheriff's Office C14 HTTF LEO and Circuit 14 Task Force meeting
12. Katia Coonan	Florida Department of Children and Families
13. Terence Coonan	FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights
14. Liana Dean	Pasco County Commission on Human Trafficking BayCare Behavioral Health Pasco County Commission on Human Trafficking
15. Brad Dennis	Called2Rescue/Search4Missing
16. Micheala Denny	Voices for Florida Open Doors Outreach Network
17. Nicole Dolack	Selah Freedom Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force
18. Francine Donnorummo	Office of the State Attorney, 20th Judicial Circuit Human Trafficking Task Force, 20th Judicial Circuit
19. Jan Edwards	Paving the Way Foundation Seminole County Human Trafficking Task Force
20. Tim Ehrenkauffer	Daytona Beach Police Department Freedom 7 HTTF
21. Luby Fields	Pasco Sheriff's Office Pasco Commission on Human Trafficking

22. Christine M. Frederick	FLITE Center Broward Human Trafficking Coalition
23. Christy Gillis	Department of Children and Families Freedom 7 Human Trafficking Taskforce
24. April Glover	Florida Department of Law Enforcement Gateway to Freedom
25. Donna Guinn	Ocala Police Department Marion County human trafficking Task Force
26. Lynn Guyton	Office of the Attorney General
27. Lisa Haba	Seminole County Human Trafficking Task Force
28. Wanda Hainley	Hendry County Sheriff's Office Southwest Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking
29. Ned Hance	Office of the Attorney General
30. Sarah Marie Henry	Catch the Wave of Hope Human Trafficking Coalition of the Treasure Coast & Okeechobee
31. Gary L. Howze	Office of the Attorney General
32. Atina Johnson	Lauderhill Police Department/FBI Child Exploitation & Human Trafficking Task Force
33. Jumorrow Johnson	Office of the State Attorney for the 17th Judicial Circuit Broward Human Trafficking Task Force
34. Theresa Kennedy	Kristi House SFHTTF & Miami SAO
35. James Kenney	Central Florida Human Trafficking Task Force
36. Sherry Kitchens	Child Advocacy Center, Inc. North East Florida Regional Human Trafficking Task Force HT
37. Mikala Klein	Central Florida Human Trafficking Task Force
38. Marcie Rey Landreth	Set Free Refuge, Inc. Circuit 1 Human Trafficking Task Force
39. Tomas Lares	United Abolitionists, Inc. Central FL Human Trafficking Task Force
40. Carlos Lisboa	Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force
41. Caridad Mas-Bachelor	Miami-Dade Police Department South Florida Human Trafficking Task Force
42. Patricia Medlock	Florida Department of Children and Families
43. Carol Messam-Gordon	Palm Beach County Victim Services

	Palm Beach County HT Task Force
44. Melanie Mitchell	Partnership for Strong Families North Central Human Trafficking Task Force Gateway to Fr33dom Human Trafficking Task Force
45. William Howell Nelson	Jacksonville Sheriff's Office North East Florida Human Trafficking Coalition
46. Katie M. O'Rourke	Office of the Attorney General Central Florida Human Trafficking Task Force
47. Nathaly M. Patterson	St. Petersburg Police Department The Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force
48. Rita Peters	Office of the Attorney General Statewide Prosecution, Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force, Circuit 10 Human Trafficking Task Force
49. Nicole Phillips	Office of the Attorney General Seminole County HT Taskforce, Space Coast HT Taskforce
50. Suzanne Pollock	Escambia County Sheriff's Office
51. Kelly Posze	Her Song, a ministry of the Tim Tebow Foundation Northeast Florida Human Trafficking Coalition
52. Dr. Tracy Salem	Community and Family Services FL Network
53. Mary Brigid Sammon	Florida Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution Central Florida Task Force
54. Chris Scaglione	Marion County Human Trafficking Task Force Marion County Human Trafficking Task Force
55. Robin Hassler Thompson	The Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center (STAC) Bend Coalition Against Human Trafficking (BBCAHT)
56. Tammy Toney-Butler	Reflective Spaces Ministry SWFL Coalition Against Human Trafficking
57. Allen Wilkett	Florida Alliance to End Human Trafficking
58. Frank Williams	US Attorney Office—Northern District of Florida
59. Victor Williams	Miami Dade County Miami Dade County Human Trafficking Coalition
60. Richard Worms	Office of the Attorney General

## **Task Force/Coalition Promising Practices & Innovations**

- **Featuring local survivor leadership**, and incorporating survivor perspectives into task force decision-making.
- **Collaboration with local universities** (translation and interpreter services, data collection & analysis, scholarly expertise).
- **Providing human trafficking awareness training for students in Hospitality Management university programs** (FSU, UCF).
- **Creation of a “one-stop-shop” initial point of contact for local service providers and law enforcement** (Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center, Big Bend Coalition Against Human Trafficking/Circuit 2).
- **Human trafficking awareness trainings for local private sector businesses.** During the era of Covid, online training opportunities for local businesses have greatly expanded (Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center, Big Bend Coalition Against Human Trafficking/Circuit 2; Marion County Task Force/Circuit 5).
- **Hiring an educator** to work with a local task force (Palm Beach/Circuit 15).
- **Implementing human trafficking awareness trainings for local hotels and motels that are not part of large national brand franchises** (Orlando/Circuit 9).
- **Implementing human trafficking awareness trainings for the transportation industry** (especially for ride-share employees such as Lyft and Uber) (Tampa Bay/Circuit 13; South Florida/Circuit 11).
- **Launching Social Media Outreach campaigns** (Okeechobee/Treasure Coast/Circuit 19; Tampa Bay/Circuit 13; Palm Beach/Circuit 15).
- **Establishing an annual Human Trafficking Film Festival** (Orlando/Circuit 9).
- **Creation of “johns’ school” for first time buyers of commercial sex** (Orlando/Circuit 9).
- **Placing human trafficking signage in local gas station restrooms** (Orlando/Circuit 9).
- **Creation of human trafficking textbook for local community college courses** (Orlando/Circuit 9).



- **Partnering with local school boards for human trafficking trainings.** One ongoing challenge in Florida has been the creation of a statewide anti-trafficking curriculum for Florida schools. Local school district efforts, however, have met with success (Broward County/Circuit 17; Okeechobee/Treasure Coast/Circuit 19; Jacksonville/Circuit 4; Freedom 7/Circuit 7; Gulf Coast/Circuit 14). At times, school boards resist “human trafficking” curricula, but are more open to “internet safety” curricula.
- **Launching Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** featuring local law enforcement and service providers (Tampa Bay Task Force/Circuit 13; Gulf Coast Task Force/Circuit 14).
- **Implementing training for Florida casinos,** with a focus on how people of color—especially indigenous American women—are vulnerable to human trafficking (Broward County Task Force/Circuit 17).
- **Providing mentoring and support for newer task forces and coalitions.** Many of Florida’s newer task forces and coalitions mentioned how important the mentoring and support provided by well-established task forces such as those in **Jacksonville/Circuit 4, Orlando/Circuit 9,** and **Palm Beach/Circuit 15** have been.
- **Collecting human trafficking data and statistics at the local level** (Orlando/Circuit 9; Southwest Florida/Circuit 20)

In general, local anti-trafficking efforts are most successful when they have substantial involvement by **law enforcement and prosecutors.** Given its agency role in both investigating child trafficking cases and in providing care for child victims, the **Department of Children and Families** is also a crucial stakeholder on each Florida task force or coalition. An increasingly important role is now also played on local task forces and coalitions by Florida’s **Child Advocacy Centers** (“CACs”). Their expertise on trauma-informed care and their relationships with Florida’s most at-risk children allow them to bring a vital skill set to local anti-trafficking efforts as well.

## Service Provider Promising Practices

- **Placing increased focus statewide on DCF-mandated Multidisciplinary Teams (“MDTs”)** in serving child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. This includes the designation of one person at the MDT to serve as the ongoing Point of Contact (“POC”) with the child. The MDT designated POC can play a further critical by following up with potential child sex trafficking victims in local DJJ facilities, many of whom may not have self-identified as a trafficking victim in their initial DJJ screening (Gainesville/Circuit 8).
- **Establishment of new residential options for adult survivors of human trafficking** (Gainesville/Circuit 8; Orlando/Circuit 9).
- **Funding housing options for adult labor trafficking survivors** (International Rescue Committee).
- **Publishing a “Guide for Survivors” including a list of local available resources** (Palm Beach/Circuit 15).
- **Assigning “education coordinators” in local schools** to spearhead trainings and also assist in identifying potential child victims (Gulf Coast/Circuit 14).
- **Providing expanded “survivor mentor” services** throughout Florida (Open Doors). Support services provided by Open Doors are now available in 33 Florida counties.
- **Establishing funding streams that follow a child, even if they are absent from care from an initial location of service delivery** (Open Doors).
- **Establishing statewide support services for families of child trafficking victims and at-risk children** (DCF).
- **Expanding services for “community kids” in Florida.** (DCF) Per recent DCF data that reveals that the majority of child sex trafficking victims in Florida are not in the Florida dependency system but are rather children still living at home, there has been a significant expansion of services for these at-home but at-risk children. This has included three of Florida’s Safe Harbor shelters recently transitioning to community service provision instead of offering residential care.
- **Placement of “community kids” in Florida Safe Harbor shelters** (DCF). This is a promising new trend by DCF although it requires consent on the part of parents and willingness on the part of the community child to accept a Safe Harbor placement.
- **Providing survivor mentor services in Florida Safe Harbor shelters** (Open Doors.)

- **Implementing the “Stop Now and Plan” evidence-based behavioral model** teaching homeless youth how to better manage their emotions and improve their impulse control (Florida Network of Child & Family Services).
- **Making therapy dogs part of the care available to child sex trafficking victims** (Gainesville Task Force /Circuit 8; Palm Beach Task Force/Circuit 15).
- **Expanding housing and support services for labor trafficking victims** (International Rescue Committee).
- **Provision of care for LGBTQ+ children.** LGBTQ+ children and young adults comprise a demographic group that is highly vulnerable to human trafficking. Many of Florida’s anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions continue providing essential care and services for them.
- **Launching a new mandatory Human Trafficking Awareness training for prospective foster care parents** (DCF). Per a new legislative mandate, DCF has created a human trafficking awareness training required for all prospective foster care parents in Florida.

## Law Enforcement/Prosecutorial Promising Practices

- **Establishing trainings for patrol and younger police officers on potential indicators of human trafficking** (Broward County/Circuit 17; Daytona/Circuit 7). There is a generational effect here as well: patrol officers who were trained as a result of the “first generation” of human trafficking trainings (circa 2005-2010) are now LE supervisors, whose anti-trafficking experience and sensibilities are crucial to departmental operations.
- **Introduction of a new LE paradigm for responding to prostitution:** A number of Florida LE jurisdictions have implemented a new approach in which they do not arrest women caught up in prostitution stings but instead treat them as potential witnesses in need of services. In this approach LE focuses first on arresting the pimps and second on arresting buyers. This new paradigm requires specific training of patrol officers in order to counter more traditional LE perceptions about prostitution (Daytona/Circuit 7).
- **Convening a “High Risk Victims Group:”** Using a model first introduced in Dallas-Fort Worth, LE serves as the convener of a monthly meeting bringing together detectives, DCF Child Protective Investigators (“CPIs”), FDLE Missing Children investigators, DJJ representatives, and local service providers who specialize in services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The group conducts an individualized update of each case involving a local child who is absent from care or has been identified as a child at risk of commercial sexual exploitation (Big Bend Human Trafficking Task Force/Circuit 2).
- **Fostering close LE collaboration with DCF Child Protective Investigators:** Given DCF’s frontline role in working with child sex trafficking victims, DCF Child Protective Investigators are ideal partners for LE. The DCF Hotline (with its maltreatment codes for both sex trafficking and labor trafficking of children) is furthermore a vital source of data for Florida policymakers. Law enforcement, of course, is a mandated reporter of suspected incidents of child trafficking.
- **Arresting “johns” in sex trafficking and prostitution investigations:** Arresting the buyers who perpetuate sex trafficking and prostitution is a vital step in combating demand. A recent sustained investigation in north Florida resulted in a nationwide record number of arrests of 180+ johns. They are being prosecuted in both state and federal court (Big Bend/Circuit 2).
- **Successfully prosecuting Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (“DMST”) cases without requiring victim witness testimony:** It was conventional prosecutorial wisdom for many years that in sex trafficking cases where a victim witness (especially a minor) refused to testify, there was little chance of a conviction. LE and state prosecutors have rendered this obsolete, successfully prosecuting traffickers even when child victim witnesses are absent from care or decline to testify. This requires additional corroborative evidence,

which LE and prosecutors can secure with family testimony or birth certificate submissions (Big Bend Human Trafficking Task Force/Circuit 2; Southwest Florida/Circuit 20).

- **Securing subpoenas for online messaging platforms:** recent DMST investigations in Florida involved recruiting and advertising children via online messaging platforms such as Facebook Messenger. Florida LE has been remarkably successful in submitting subpoena requests to retrieve these communications for use as evidence at trial—especially when victim witness testimony may not be forthcoming (Big Bend/Circuit 2).
- **Increasing LE reliance on Victim Advocates:** Victim advocates have long been a vital part of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Their role is even more crucial in human trafficking investigations, where they bring heightened victim sensibilities—especially trauma-informed care—to law enforcement operations. They are often the crucial link between the victim and investigators. In recent years in Florida, they have assumed a new role in recognizing and reporting human trafficking cases as well.
- **Including the Missing Persons LE unit in the agency’s and local task force’s LE anti-trafficking mission:** The link between missing persons (especially children) and human trafficking has been documented repeatedly. Bringing local LE’s Missing Persons unit to the table in anti-trafficking efforts and investigations is already yielding promising results (Palm Beach/Circuit 15).
- **Utilizing Florida’s laws requiring signage in massage businesses to gather intelligence:** Florida statutes requiring massage businesses to post signage regarding human trafficking on their business premises afford LE the opportunity to access these premises without a search warrant to ascertain that such signage has been posted. Having “eyes-on” such places of business can alert LE to overt indicators of human trafficking. (Daytona/Circuit 7).
- **Cross-swearing local state attorneys to also serve as federal prosecutors:** Empowering state attorneys to likewise serve as federal prosecutors reduces the possibility that local cases might “fall through” a prosecutorial gap. It also allows cases to be assigned to the optimal court system to ensure that the most promising regime of law (either state or federal) be deployed against traffickers (Jacksonville/Circuit 4).
- **Vigorously enforcing Florida’s \$5000 criminal fine against those who solicit prostitution:** Another crucial component of Florida’s efforts to combat demand, Florida state prosecutors have collected over \$1.8 million to date (almost half of which has been collected by Polk County prosecutors alone). \$500 of each fine levied goes to support drug treatment programs for Florida minors, and the remaining \$4500 directly supports Florida Safe Harbor programs.

## Florida Legal & Judicial Promising Practices

- **Creation of special judicial dockets for sex trafficked minors and minors at risk of commercial sexual exploitation** (Miami-Dade/Circuit 11; Broward/Circuit 17; Hillsboro/Circuit 13). This includes combining delinquency and dependency dockets, given that children are often involved in both Florida court systems. It also features the expanding involvement of survivor mentors with at-risk and exploited children, both in the courtroom and beyond.
- **Creation of a special judicial docket and program for prostituted adult women:** The Turn Your Life Around (“TYLA”) program is designed to assist and motivate adult women to leave the exploitation of prostitution. It recognizes that often many such women were child sex trafficking victims before aging out legally and turning 18. It is built on the premise that engagement in commercial sex often reflects not so much a choice but rather a lack of choices (Sarasota/12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit).
- **Designation of one judge to adjudicate all local human trafficking-related expungement cases:** Given that many human trafficking survivors have accrued numerous convictions for crimes related to their trafficking, they face the daunting legal task of petitioning for multiple expungements under Florida law. This process has become streamlined in Broward County where one judge adjudicates all human trafficking-related expungement applications. This promising practice both enhances judicial efficiency and allows the judge to better understand the personal histories of applicants (Broward/Circuit 17).
- **Enhanced facilitator liability for actors and commercial enterprises that benefit from human trafficking:** Following the establishment of civil liability for facilitators of human trafficking under federal law in 2008, there have been a wave of civil lawsuits in Florida and nationwide against companies that allegedly benefited from the exploitation of human trafficking victims. Recent federal lawsuits have been filed by Florida attorneys against hotels as well as against social media companies whose platforms were allegedly used to recruit, advertise, and exploit Florida human trafficking victims.

## **Specialized Presentations**

By invitation, a number of state agencies and non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) that support anti-trafficking work presented to the participants at the meeting. They summarized the services that they provide as well as resources they can make available to task forces and coalitions throughout the state.

### **(1) Department of Children and Families**

DCF representatives explained the mandate given by the Florida Legislature to DCF to serve as the lead agency in Florida on child trafficking issues, and introduced the regional DCF anti-trafficking coordinators for north, central, and south Florida. They described the mechanics of the DCF Hotline system and the process by which the Hotline fields and responds to calls, especially from mandated abuse reporters. Noting that recent data indicates that close to 77% of calls to the Hotline report children being trafficked in community situations (rather than in the dependency system) they outlined a new DCF support program for Florida families of at-risk children. They also described the mission of an ongoing DCF-FSU Work Group that is exploring new modalities of response and treatment of sex trafficked children who repeatedly return to their traffickers and life-threatening situations.

### **(2) Office of the Statewide Prosecutor**

Florida’s Office of the Statewide Prosecutor, which operates under the Office of the Attorney General, has jurisdiction over organized criminal activities that impact two or more judicial circuits in Florida. Since 2013, this has included jurisdiction over human trafficking enterprises. The Office of the Statewide Prosecutor described the significant tools it utilizes to combat human trafficking and how their deep and longstanding relationships with law enforcement throughout the state have assisted in those efforts. In pursuing cases that involve the internet, the Statewide Prosecutor can decide where to prosecute the case. Relatively low prosecutor turnover and prosecutors with significant trial experience also afford this office significant institutional memory. The Office performs legislative analysis of prospective human trafficking bills, and has assisted with expungements of convictions related to human trafficking exploitation.

### **(3) The Florida Network of Child and Family Services (FNCFS)**

At times termed “the prevention arm of DJJ,” FNCFS operates 28 shelters throughout Florida that provide crisis shelter and community counseling services to “runaway” or “throwaway” children. They maintain 24/7 shelters and services in each of Florida’s judicial circuits, making them natural partners for Florida’s anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions. Because they offer temporary shelter as well as crisis stabilization assistance, they are a crucial resource for child trafficking victims in Florida who may be absent from care and contending with issues of emotional stability. FNCFS utilizes a

“Stop Now and Plan” program, an evidence-based behavioral model that assists minors with the management of their emotions. FNCFS partners with many of Florida’s Safe Harbor shelters, as its shelters may provide a safe “time-out” option for a child who is absent from care. FNCFS also maintains data on the children they serve—an important resource for Florida policymakers assessing state trends that impact human trafficking.

#### **(4) The International Rescue Committee (IRC)**

The IRC has been a long-time service provider in Florida for refugees, asylum-seekers, and torture victims from around the world. It has extended its services to human trafficking victims as well, operating in south Florida and in 10 counties in north Florida. Importantly, it provides services to both foreign national and U.S. citizen victims of trafficking, and recently has secured a new grant for housing services in north Florida. It also has expertise in serving the needs of labor trafficking victims who have been exploited in Florida’s agricultural sector—one of the service gaps in a state where agriculture is a leading industry.

#### **(5) Open Doors**

Open Doors serves as an important “backbone organization” of the Florida anti-trafficking movement. Operating in 33 counties, it provides services to dependent and community child trafficking victims (working with both verified and at-risk children). Based on the survivor-mentor model, Open Doors increasingly is part of 24/7 on-call outreach teams that include a victim service coordinator, a regional advocate, and a clinician. Survivor mentors also provide support to Florida special docket courts and to Florida Safe Harbor shelters as well. Open Doors has provided services to over 1400 victims to date (87% of whom identify as female and 7% as male). Among the promising practices pioneered by Open Doors is the service model by which funding follows the child, given the high mobility of many of Florida’s minors who are exploited in human trafficking schemes.

#### **(6) Search4Missing**

Search4Missing is one of Florida’s longstanding NGOs that specializes in locating missing children—especially those ensnared in human trafficking exploitation. Founder and team leader Brad Dennis noted that he is in “the find business.” He described the philosophy of Search4Missing: that there is no runaway child; just at-risk children. Search4Missing has located over 180 missing children in the last two years. They do so with a highly trained intel team that focuses on social media indicators of trafficking and even maintains its own chat service operation. Deploying nationwide, Search4Missing specializes in providing assistance to smaller LE jurisdictions that may lack the resources to fully investigate complex human trafficking schemes. The organization loans vehicles and equipment to LE agencies, including burner phones, pole cams, etc. Search4Missing works closely with DCF as well as with LE agencies.



## Human Trafficking Trends in Florida

Participants at the two-day meeting—both LE and service providers—were asked to describe current patterns of human trafficking in their respective jurisdictions and localities. While anecdotal, the following are their responses based on their on-the-ground perspectives:

- **In most instances, sex trafficking of U.S. minors in Florida involves almost no element of movement at all.** It is rather perpetrated in a victim's own neighborhood, by local neighborhood pimps, who prey on local neighborhood girls, and where the clients are local neighborhood johns.
- While there was discussion at the meeting of targeting organized criminal syndicates in Florida that perpetrate sex trafficking, **the LE consensus** was that it is **not** the **Organized Crime Unit** that will typically be called upon to investigate trafficking. It is rather **the Missing Children's Unit**—this is where most of Florida's sex trafficking victims are.
- **Florida's child sex trafficking victims are not typically advertised on escort websites but rather on social media messenger platforms or dating apps.**
- **Social media** is also frequently used to **recruit children for commercial sex**—and luring a child into a sexting exchange will often become the means by which a child can be extorted into commercial sexual exploitation.
- **Local drug dealers are frequently becoming sex traffickers**, facilitating addiction on the part of children or women they sell to and then coercing them into commercial sex in exchange for the drug on which they have become dependent.
- **In most instances of familial trafficking, a child is prostituted to support a family member's drug habit.** This typically involves heroin, crack cocaine, or opioids.
- **There have been many recent trafficking cases involving theft of benefits as variation of labor trafficking. Often the victims are persons with developmental disabilities.**
- **Florida has witnessed a great deal of labor trafficking, especially in the agricultural sector, that is rarely investigated or prosecuted.** Many of the cases involve the exploitation of foreign nationals legally here on H-2A farmworker visas but who are trafficked nonetheless.
- **Foreign national child labor trafficking** is also on the rise in Florida (in agricultural pursuits, such as harvesting palmetto berries in Florida woods) and in cases of domestic servitude.

- **Versions of travelling sales crews** continue to exploit U.S. citizen children in Florida (often from underprivileged neighborhoods). Alleged traffickers often assume the mantle of a faith-based group to garner credibility.
- There have been reports in Florida and nationwide of alleged labor trafficking of minors in “**the Troubled Teen Industry.**” The labor required of minors who are enrolled in these “tough love” programs by their parents can approximate forced labor that is either uncompensated or vastly underpaid.
- **A full 77% of the calls to DCF’s Florida Abuse Hotline** this year reported instances of trafficking of community children—children living at home and not in the DCF dependency system (i.e., group homes or foster care). Data also reflects that less than 1% of children in Florida’s foster care system are verified as child sex trafficking victims. This is an important corrective to the mistaken assumption that Florida’s foster care system is rife with child sex trafficking abuses.
- A new challenge identified by child welfare professionals and law enforcement involves **seeking better treatment modalities and institutional care options for child sex trafficking victims who routinely return to pimps and life-threatening situations of commercial sexual exploitation.** Current Safe Harbor laws do not permit even brief trauma-informed secure modes of intervention.

### **Policy and Legislative Recommendations**

Meeting participants were asked make proposals for potential policy and legislative changes based on their hands-on involvement in Florida’s anti-trafficking mission. The following is a summary of those recommendations:

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- **Certify local Florida law enforcement officers to assist in human trafficking investigations outside of their normal county of jurisdiction.**
- **Create a statewide common standard for vetting new members of local task forces and coalitions.** It can be adapted as needed by local task forces and coalitions.
- **Create a framework that will allow regional groups of Florida law enforcement to better collaborate on human trafficking cases, including intelligence sharing and joint operations.**

- **Introduce a standardized human trafficking training curriculum for state prosecutors through the Florida Prosecuting Attorneys Association.** Current prosecutorial approaches vary widely throughout Florida. Given the high rate of turnover in the ranks of state prosecutors, this should be a mandatory course offered on a regular basis. This is urgently needed in rural judicial circuits in Florida where state attorneys have less experience prosecuting human trafficking cases.
- **Discourage state prosecutors from allowing misdemeanor plea deals for perpetrators accused of felony human trafficking crimes.**
- **Utilize FDLE resources with greater effect in rural counties that have more limited law enforcement budgets and fewer specialized investigators.**
- **Create a week-long advanced immersive law enforcement training course on human trafficking, examining model cases from start to finish.**
- **Create a statewide database and directory of vetted service providers in each of Florida’s judicial circuits.** Vetted service providers must be very explicit about the actual services they provide and must also be very transparent if there are victim groups they will not serve (such as LGBTQ+ youth).
- **Have Florida state prosecutors more consistently enforce the \$5000 solicitation fine mandated by Florida statute 796.07(6).** Polk County has led the way, collecting almost \$900,000 of the total \$1.8 million collected since 2012. In contrast, some counties have collected almost nothing. This disparity should be rectified.

### **Legislative Recommendations**

- **Bring on additional state agencies to serve on the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking, including the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR), and the Agency of Persons with Disabilities (APD).**
- **Eliminate Florida’s outlier practice of allowing deposition by right of child sex trafficking victims and child victims of sex abuse.** 44 states and the federal court system have eliminated this abusive practice. Florida should better protect its child sex trafficking victims and prohibit this as well.
- **Revisit the Florida definition of labor trafficking and better define what constitutes “exploitation.”** Current Florida law regarding labor trafficking provides state prosecutors few opportunities for prosecuting this growing crime.

- **Revisit Florida laws on child labor trafficking.** Some advocates mistakenly believe that the elimination of the term “coercion” from the statute now means that all work by children is labor trafficking per se. Florida statutes should clarify the difference between regulated instances of legitimate “child work” in contrast to illegal “child labor.” Florida law should also recognize the varied ways that children can be exploited for child labor.
- **Add a human trafficking indicator box to Florida Arrest Records.** Now that all sworn Florida law enforcement are mandated to receive training on human trafficking, this is an optimal time to begin recording when any semblance of human trafficking may be discernible when an arrest of any kind under Florida law is made. This would have almost zero fiscal impact, would enhance human trafficking investigations, and would greatly improve data collection on this crime statewide.
- **Address the situation of sales crews operating in Florida,** especially as they facilitate labor trafficking of **vulnerable U.S. citizen minors.**
- **Enact a statute providing an affirmative defense in Florida law for victims coerced into committing crimes by their traffickers.** Florida already has expungement laws for those who have accrued criminal convictions as a result of their trafficking. An affirmative defense would prevent victims from even incurring these convictions and would be a cost-saving measure for the Florida court system.

### **Requests for Meeting Follow-up**

Participants asked that the following measures be explored as follow-up to the May 5-6, 2022 meeting:

- **Create and maintain a statewide list of vetted service providers.**
- **Create a secure communication platform that can be used by the members of Florida’s anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions. One option would be a social media page account accessible by invitation only.**
- **Convene a quarterly Zoom meeting for Florida Task Forces and Coalitions.**
- **Request that DCF provide a list of potential Florida agency representatives who could assist or serve on local task forces and coalitions – *See Appendix A for DCF Response***

- **Request that FDLE or OAG facilitate the convening of regional law enforcement officers to address human trafficking operations that may move beyond or between Florida judicial circuits.**

## Appendix A

### DCF List of Potential Task Force Members

- A. State Agencies/Local (county) representatives
  - a. **Department of Children and Families (Regional HT Coordinator, Criminal Justice Coordinator, HT Certified CPIs and CPISs)**
  - b. **Department of Juvenile Justice (Local HT liaisons, JPO with HT kids on their caseloads)**
  - c. **Department of Education**
  - d. **Department of Health**
  - e. **Department of Transportation**
  - f. **Department of Labor**
  - g. **Department of Corrections**
  - h. **Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)**
  - i. **Department of Business & Professional Regulation**
  
- B. LE
  - a. **FDLE**
  - b. **Sheriff's Office**
  - c. **Local PD**
  - d. **FBI**
  - e. **DHS**
  - f. **FHP**
  - g. **Local military bases investigative units**
  - h. **State Attorney Office**
  - i. **U.S. Attorney Office**
  
- C. County offices
  - a. **School District**
  - b. **County Health Department**
  - c. **County Jail**
  
- D. Service Providers
  - a. **DV shelter**
  - b. **Child Advocacy Centers (CACs)**
  - c. **Community-Based Caregivers (CBCs)**
  - d. **Local NGOs**
  - e. **Faith-based groups**
  - f. **Local hospitals**
  - g. **Local colleges/universities**
  - h. **Local adult education provider**
  - i. **Homeless Shelters**