

# HOUSTON AREA COUNCIL

## *on Human Trafficking*

### **What is Human Trafficking?**

#### **Overview**

Human trafficking is an egregious human rights violation. In this lucrative criminal enterprise, people are treated as commodities to make a profit for traffickers. Victims may be forced to provide labor services or have their bodies sold for sex. While this is a serious problem in other countries, it is not just an international issue. Men, women, and children are bought and sold every day in the United States, and sadly, Houston has been identified as a hub for this criminal activity.

Fortunately, Texas has been a leader in the fight against human trafficking. It was one of the first states in the nation to pass a human trafficking statute, and Houston area lawmakers have been champions for anti-trafficking legislation. It takes all different types of stakeholders working together to ensure a comprehensive approach to this issue, and the Houston Area Council on Human Trafficking will work tirelessly to make the message loud and clear: no person is for sale.

#### **Sex Trafficking**

Sex trafficking occurs when a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, *or in which the person performing the act is under the age of 18*. Sex trafficking occurs in a number of venues, including the internet, street prostitution, illicit massage parlors, cantinas, and other sexually oriented businesses. Victims are bought and sold through force, fraud, or coercion and may be lured as vulnerable children into a life of prostitution. The demand for commercial sex fuels this criminal enterprise, and in Houston, the demand is high. Our community is home to over 300 illegitimate sexually oriented businesses, and hundreds of internet advertisements are posted for commercial sex in Houston each day. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation are hiding in plain sight, and the first step to combatting the issue is for community members to become aware of the issue in their own backyard.

#### **Labor Trafficking**

Labor trafficking occurs when individuals are forced or coerced into working against their will. Physical and psychological control are used to make victims work long hours for little or no pay.

The International Labor Organization estimates that over 14 million individuals worldwide are victims of labor trafficking. Demand for cheap labor fuels this industry, and in December of 2014, the U.S Department of Labor identified 136 goods produced globally through child labor and forced labor. This slave labor taints the supply chains of goods produced and consumed in our country. Labor trafficking also occurs on our own soil, and victims often go unidentified. Common venues and industries for labor trafficking in Texas include traveling sales crews, domestic work, construction, agriculture, and health and beauty services.

### **See Something? Say Something!**

Tips from community members are an essential component of identifying traffickers and rescuing victims. If you suspect human trafficking activity, make an anonymous call to the national human trafficking hotline at **1-888-3737-888**. If you believe someone may be in imminent danger, contact **911**.