

A SCOURGE AGAINST HUMANITY: ADDRESSING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AT MASS GATHERINGS

HEARING
BEFORE THE
TASK FORCE ON
ENHANCING SECURITY FOR SPECIAL
EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION
DECEMBER 17, 2025
Serial No. 119-32

Printed for the use of the Committee on Homeland Security



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

63-129 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2026

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

ANDREW R. GARBARINO, New York, *Chairman*

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, Texas, <i>Vice Chair</i>	BENNIE G. THOMPSON, Mississippi, <i>Ranking Member</i>
MICHAEL GUEST, Mississippi	ERIC SWALWELL, California
CARLOS A. GIMENEZ, Florida	J. LUIS CORREA, California
AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas	SHRI THANEDAR, Michigan
MARJORIE TAYLOR GREENE, Georgia	SETH MAGAZINER, Rhode Island
TONY GONZALES, Texas	DANIEL S. GOLDMAN, New York
MORGAN LUTTRELL, Texas	DELIA C. RAMIREZ, Illinois
DALE W. STRONG, Alabama	TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY, New York
JOSH BRECHEEN, Oklahoma	LAMONICA MCIVER, New Jersey
ELIJAH CRANE, Arizona	JULIE JOHNSON, Texas, <i>Vice Ranking Member</i>
ANDREW OGLES, Tennessee	PABLO JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ, Puerto Rico
SHERI BIGGS, South Carolina	NELLIE POU, New Jersey
GABE EVANS, Colorado	JAMES R. WALKINSHAW, Virginia
RYAN MACKENZIE, Pennsylvania	TROY A. CARTER, Louisiana
BRAD KNOTT, North Carolina	AL GREEN, Texas
VINCE FONG, California	
MATT VAN EPPS, Tennessee	

KEIGHLE JOYCE, *Staff Director*

HOPE GOINS, *Minority Staff Director*

SEAN CORCORAN, *Chief Clerk*

TASK FORCE ON ENHANCING SECURITY FOR SPECIAL EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, Texas, *Chairman*

CARLOS A. GIMENEZ, Florida	NELLIE POU, New Jersey, <i>Ranking Member</i>
DALE W. STRONG, Alabama	ERIC SWALWELL, California
ELIJAH CRANE, Arizona	LAMONICA MCIVER, New Jersey
ANDREW R. GARBARINO, New York (<i>ex officio</i>)	BENNIE G. THOMPSON, Mississippi (<i>ex officio</i>)

DIANA BERGWIN, *Task Force Staff Director*

JEREMY GAERTNER, *Minority Task Force Staff Director*

CONTENTS

	Page
STATEMENTS	
The Honorable Michael T. McCaul, a Representative in Congress From the State of Texas, and Chairman, Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States:	
Oral Statement	1
Prepared Statement	3
The Honorable Nellie Pou, a Representative in Congress From the State of New Jersey, and Ranking Member, Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States:	
Oral Statement	4
Prepared Statement	5
WITNESSES	
Mr. Jonathan Thompson, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, National Sheriff's Association:	
Oral Statement	8
Prepared Statement	9
Ms. Courtney Litvak, Director of Survivor Leader Initiatives, No Trafficking Zone:	
Oral Statement	11
Prepared Statement	14
Ms. Yasmin Vafa, Executive Director, Rights4Girls:	
Oral Statement	19
Prepared Statement	21
Ms. Eliza McCoy, Vice President, Programs & Impact, American Hotel and Lodging Association Foundation:	
Oral Statement	23
Prepared Statement	25
Ms. Meagan Lundstrom, Chief Executive Officer, Polaris:	
Oral Statement	29
Prepared Statement	31
FOR THE RECORD	
The Honorable Michael T. McCaul, a Representative in Congress From the State of Texas, and Chairman, Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States:	
Letter From Airlines for America	6

A SCOURGE AGAINST HUMANITY: ADDRESSING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AT MASS GATHERINGS

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
TASK FORCE ON ENHANCING SECURITY FOR SPECIAL EVENTS
IN THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:07 p.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Michael T. McCaul [Chairman of the Task Force] presiding.

Present: Representatives McCaul, Strong, Crane, Pou, and McIver.

Present: Representatives Luttrell, and Correa.

Mr. McCAUL. The Committee on Homeland Security Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States will come to order. Without objection, the Chair may declare the committee in recess at any point.

Without objection, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Luttrell, will be sitting on this panel discussion. The gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Mackenzie; the gentleman from California, Mr. Correa; the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Green, are permitted to sit on the dais and ask the witnesses questions.

The purpose of today's hearing is to assess the threat of and efforts to combat human trafficking ahead of major events that will be held in the United States, such as the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will begin in June. So we have a very short time frame to get our act together, and the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, along with the 250th anniversary of the United States of America.

I recognize myself for an opening statement.

This is the third hearing of the bipartisan Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States. The task force provides us a unique opportunity to evaluate the range of threats facing upcoming mass gathering events, most importantly, as I stated, FIFA World Cup, the America's 250th anniversary.

Over the past several months, we have examined historic security incidents at major events, engaged with Federal law enforcement on emerging threats such as malicious drone activities, which are one of the biggest threats. We have held in-depth discussions with security leadership from FIFA and the Olympics. These discussions have informed our work to provide legislative solutions to protect these events and ensure that they showcase American lead-

ership. In fact, the legislation this task force is working on to counter adversarial drones at these events recently passed in the House National Defense Authorization, which we were very pleased to see. I want to thank the White House for working with us to get that language in there and passed, you know, into law.

When we first established this, Ranking Member Pou and I agreed that that human trafficking associated with these events would be among the various challenges that need to be addressed. This is an issue that is near and dear to my heart. I know it is near and dear to the Ranking Member's heart. It is one that is a very tragic story that we have seen up front, close, and personal, and especially with Ms. Courtney Litvak, who I have had the honor to be associated with from her family to work, getting her appointed to the White House Advisory Council on Human Trafficking. A person who experienced grave danger and abuse at the hands of these traffickers. I know she has her personal story to tell, but I was so glad that God blessed us and saved her life and brought her home.

Millions of people that will be subjected to forced labor and sexual exploitation, they are every day. As we prepare to host the largest international sporting event in history, it is essential that law enforcement, advocacy groups, industry partners, and the Federal Government work together to disrupt trafficking operations to protect the most vulnerable amongst us.

There are about an estimated 27.6 million people being trafficked worldwide. That is an astounding number. Seventy-seven percent in forced labor, 23 percent in sex trafficking, and men and boys account for 57 percent of victims, women and girls for 43 percent. It occurs every day in the United States and across the globe.

This crime remains hidden to a large extent. The experiences of survivors are not told as often as they should. Their courage in sharing their stories, like Ms. Litvak, often have helped law enforcement learn how to recognize signs of exploitation, internet—intercept criminal networks, and rescue victims. I have been long committed to this cause. We call it human slavery. Back in 2017, I was proud to cosponsor—or, I am sorry, to sponsor a bill which became law. That was the Congressional authorization of DHS's Blue Campaign. This legislation has enabled the Department of Homeland Security to properly coordinate anti-human trafficking activities and serve as a resource of State and local law enforcement to end human trafficking. I don't think we are anywhere near ending human trafficking, though, unfortunately.

In 2020, I led legislation requiring U.S. Department of State to track and report when and where traffickers applied for U.S. visas and we denied those visas. This bill extended the U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking I talked about through 2025. We will have to reauthorize that to ensure survivors have a platform on that council to advise the President's Interagency Task Force on Policies to Combat Trafficking.

As I mentioned, we are delighted to have Courtney Litvak here and all of you, between the sheriff and the hotel and motel association, we rely on law enforcement to enforce justice, put a stop on these horrible crimes being committed. Training and coordination must extend beyond law enforcement to include, as we have here

today, hotel staff, organizers, transportation. It goes into a lot of different areas.

I can go on and on with this, but at the end of the day, I think this is an important hearing to address a very horrible crime scourge that is around the world, but we don't—obviously, seeing it in the United States is very difficult. I anticipate with these World Cup events coming up, just like we have seen with Super Bowl games, and I think we will be talking about the Houston one in particular. It is one of the—as Federal—former Federal prosecutor, Chairman of this committee former. It is one of the most horrific things I have seen in my lifetime. I want to do everything we can, Ms. Pou, and this task force to try to ensure these games are safely conducted with as little of this criminal activity as possible.

[The statement of Chairman McCaul follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MICHAEL T. MCCAUL

Welcome to the third hearing of the bipartisan Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States. This task force provides us a unique opportunity to evaluate the range of threats facing upcoming mass gathering events—most immediately the FIFA World Cup and America's 250th Anniversary in the summer of 2026.

Over the past several months, we have examined historic security incidents at major events, engaged with Federal law enforcement on emerging threats such as malicious drone activity, and held in-depth discussions with security leadership from FIFA and the Los Angeles Olympics. These discussions have informed our work to provide legislative solutions to protect these events and ensure they showcase American leadership. In fact, the legislation this task force was working on to counter adversarial drones at these events recently passed the House in the NDAA.

When we first established this task force, Ranking Member Pou and I agreed that human trafficking associated with these events would be among the challenges we addressed. The United States stands as a beacon of freedom, prosperity, and opportunity. Yet every day, millions of people are subjected to forced labor and sexual exploitation. As we prepare to host the largest international sporting event in history, it is essential that law enforcement, advocacy groups, industry partners, and the Federal Government work together to disrupt trafficking operations and protect the most vulnerable among us.

Today, an estimated 27.6 million people are being trafficked worldwide: 77 percent in forced labor and 23 percent in sex trafficking. Men and boys account for 57 percent of victims, women and girls for 43 percent. Trafficking occurs every day in the United States, across the globe, and in our own communities.

While much about this crime remains hidden, the experiences of survivors must inform our response. Their courage in sharing their stories has helped law enforcement learn how to recognize signs of exploitation, intercept criminal networks, and rescue victims.

I have long been committed to eradicating the societal scourge that is human trafficking. Back in 2017, I was proud to sponsor a bill, which has since become law, granting Congressional authorization to DHS's Blue Campaign. That legislation has enabled the Department of Homeland Security to properly coordinate anti-human trafficking activities while also serving as a resource to State and local law enforcement personnel working to end human trafficking. In 2020, I led legislation requiring the U.S. Department of State to track and report when and where traffickers applied for U.S. visas and were denied. This bill also extended the U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking through 2025, ensuring survivors continue to have a platform to advise the President's Interagency Task Force on policies to combat trafficking. I'm extremely proud that with us today is Courtney Litvak, a member of that advisory council and a truly inspiring young woman I've been honored to work with over the years.

As much as we rely on law enforcement to enforce justice and put a stop to the transnational criminal organizations and trafficking rings responsible for this heinous crime, advocacy groups and industry partners also play a critical role through providing intelligence and raising public awareness. Training and coordination must extend beyond law enforcement to include hotel staff, venue security, event orga-

nizers, transportation personnel, and other front-line workers. These individuals are often the first to identify signs of trafficking. Early detection and intervention will be essential.

Today's hearing is an important step in preparing our Nation for the scale of what lies ahead. It is our responsibility to ensure these historic events are remembered not only for their celebration of international coordination and pride, but for our commitment to protecting the ideals this Nation was founded upon. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and continuing our work to confront this challenge with the urgency it demands.

Mr. McCaul. So with that, I now recognize the Ranking Member, the gentlelady from New Jersey, Ms. Pou, for her opening statement.

Ms. POU. Thank you. Thank you so very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon to everyone.

Mr. Chairman, I am glad to be leading our bipartisan task force with you today on such an important topic. Before I start, I want to express my deepest sympathies and condolences to the victims and families of the horrible shooting at Brown University and those in Australia this past weekend.

So let me just begin by saying as, as you have just expressed, you know, human trafficking often is overlooked or ignored in the United States. Chairman McCaul, I know that you have worked to combat trafficking, particularly through your leadership in authorizing, as you have just mentioned, the Blue Campaign at the Department of Homeland Security, which has saved countless lives. Bringing attention and resources to combat human trafficking has been a long-time priority for me as well.

In the New Jersey State legislature, I led legislation that broadened the definition of trafficking, increasing penalties for perpetrators, and provided support for victims. We must do everything possible to prevent individuals from being trafficked and fully prosecute those who commit trafficking crimes.

Earlier this year, I co-led bipartisan legislation with Congressman Guest that strengthens our ability to stop drug and human trafficking abroad. The House passed that measure and now we just simply need the Senate to act.

Today's hearing is another opportunity to discuss that and other policies that we can implement to prevent trafficking at some of the largest events in our Nation's history. In the coming years, we will welcome people from all around the world for the World Cup. That is just next year. I said in the coming years, but it is here. Before we know it, it will certainly be here in front of us, welcoming everyone from around the world for the World Cup and the Olympics and the Paralympics Games. This is particularly exciting for me as our district in northern New Jersey will host the World Cup Final.

The threat environment for human trafficking will become more and more complex. There will be criminals who traffic and enslave laborers and criminals will sell cheap merchandise made using slave labor from foreign countries. World Cup matches will be spread around and across 3 different countries, and our country will host games in 11 different cities. That means that people will be traveling and constantly moving, giving traffickers cover for their illegal and sick behavior.

Now is the time to be proactive. We have to make sure that our Federal, State, and local partners are trained in how to recognize the signs of human trafficking and forced labor trafficking and are equipped with the resources needed to halt these threats. I am concerned that personnel at DHS, including at the Center for Countering Human Trafficking and Homeland Security Investigations, are being reassigned to other priorities outside of human trafficking and the child sexual exploitation investigations.

As Members of Congress, we have a responsibility to raise public awareness on human trafficking. This hearing is a good step in that direction.

Mr. Chairman, and I certainly thank you for doing this. I look forward to the hearing, to hearing from our witnesses who really have been on the front line on all of this. So thank you to each and every one of you for participating, for being a part of this, and for sharing your stories.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Pou follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER NELLIE POU

DECEMBER 17, 2025

Human trafficking often is overlooked or ignored in the United States. Chairman McCaul, I know that you have worked to combat trafficking, particularly through your leadership in authorizing the Blue Campaign at the Department of Homeland Security, which has saved countless lives.

Bringing attention and resources to combat human trafficking has been a long-time priority for me as well. In the New Jersey State legislature, I led legislation that broadened the definition of trafficking, increased penalties for perpetrators, and provided support for victims. We must do everything possible to prevent individuals from being trafficked and fully prosecute those who commit trafficking crimes.

Earlier this year I co-led bipartisan legislation with Congressman Guest that strengthens our ability to stop drug and human trafficking abroad. The House passed that measure and now we need the Senate to act. Today's hearing is another opportunity to discuss that and other policies we can implement to prevent trafficking at some of the largest events in our Nation's history. In the coming years, we will welcome people from all around the world for the World Cup and the Olympic and Paralympic games.

This is particularly exciting for me as our district in northern New Jersey will host the World Cup final.

The threat environment for human trafficking will become more and more complex. There will be criminals who traffic and enslave laborers. And criminals will sell cheap merchandise made using slave labor from foreign countries. World Cup matches will be spread across 3 different countries, and our country will host games in 11 different cities. That means that people will be traveling and constantly moving, giving traffickers cover for their illegal and sick behavior. Now is the time to be proactive.

We have to make sure that our Federal, State, and local partners are trained in how to recognize the signs of human trafficking and forced labor trafficking and are equipped with the resources needed to halt these threats. I am concerned that personnel at DHS, including at the Center for Countering Human Trafficking and Homeland Security Investigations, are being reassigned to other priorities outside of human trafficking and child sexual exploitation investigations.

As Members of Congress we have a responsibility to raise public awareness on human trafficking. This hearing is a good step in that direction. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the front lines.

Mr. MCCAUL. I thank the Ranking Member.

Other Members are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record. Without objection, I want to submit this letter from Airlines for America, discussing their participation with

the DHS Blue Campaign and preparations for the World Cup. Without objection, so ordered.
[The information follows:]

LETTER FROM AIRLINES FOR AMERICA

December 15, 2025.

The Honorable MICHAEL MCCAUL,
Chairman, Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States, H2-176 Ford House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515.

RE: Hearing on “A Scourge Against Humanity: Addressing Human Trafficking at Mass Gatherings”

DEAR CHAIRMAN MCCAUL: As the United States prepares for the FIFA World Cup in 2026 and the International Summer Olympic Games in 2028, Airlines for America (A4A)¹ welcomes the opportunity to submit comments for the record regarding the hearing entitled “A Scourge Against Humanity: Addressing Human Trafficking at Mass Gatherings.”

With preparations already underway, A4A and our member airlines are committed to working with Federal, State, and local governments to support efforts to combat human trafficking. Aviation plays a key role in our nation’s critical infrastructure, and our sector’s operations are dependent and reliant upon the many government agencies we interact with, including the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

AIRLINE PARTICIPATION IN FIFA WORLD CUP 2026 WORKING GROUPS

Alongside CBP and TSA, A4A participates in two working groups under the White House Task Force on the FIFA World Cup: The International Visitors and Visas Working Group is focused on ensuring streamlined and legal processing for visitors arriving to the United States and for U.S. citizens and residents traveling internationally across venue locations. The Transportation, Travel, and Tourism Working Group is focused on ensuring operational readiness at U.S. airports and venue locations with a focus on hospitality and innovation to meet the President’s vision to usher in a golden age of travel.

A4A and our members are supportive of the administration’s vision and committed to working together to ensure the success of the FIFA World Cup while prioritizing the safety and security of the traveling public, including those who may be at risk of human trafficking.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY’S BLUE CAMPAIGN

A4A and our member airlines are also active partners in the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Blue Campaign and other Federal, State, and local human trafficking prevention programs. As described by DHS: Blue Campaign is a national public awareness campaign designed to educate the public, law, enforcement, and other industry partners to recognize the indicators of human trafficking and how to appropriately respond to possible cases. Blue Campaign works closely with DHS components to develop general awareness training, as well as specific educational resources to help reduce victimization within vulnerable populations.

Located within the Office of Partnership and Engagement and aligned with the DHS Center for Countering Human Trafficking, Blue Campaign leverages partnerships with the private sector, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), law enforcement, and State/local authorities to maximize national public engagement on anti-human trafficking efforts. Blue Campaign’s educational awareness objectives consist of two foundational elements, prevention of human trafficking and protection of exploited persons.²

HUMAN TRAFFICKING REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS ON AIRLINE INDUSTRY

In addition, beginning in 2009, Congress has enacted several pieces of legislation outlining air carrier requirements to train employees to recognize and respond to potential instances of human trafficking. These include:

¹ A4A is the trade association for the leading U.S. airlines, both passenger and cargo carriers. Members of the association are Alaska Air Group; American Airlines; Atlas Air; Delta Air Lines; FedEx; JetBlue Airways; Southwest Airlines; United Airlines; and UPS. Air Canada is an associate member.

² <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/about-blue-campaign>.

- *2016 FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act.*—Requires air carriers to expand annual training for flight attendants to include recognizing and responding to potential instances of human trafficking.
- *2018 FAA Reauthorization Act.*—Requires air carriers to annually train “ticket counter agents, gate agents and other air carrier workers whose job require regular interaction with passengers” to recognize and respond to potential instances of human trafficking.
- *2019 Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act.*—Requires certain air carriers to track the number of personnel trained to recognize and report human trafficking, the number of notifications received from staff and passengers and whether the air carrier notified the National Human Trafficking Hotline or law enforcement at the relevant airport.
- *2022 Human Trafficking Prevention Act.*—Requires that DOT seek to provide for the posting of contact information of the National Human Trafficking Hotline in the restrooms of each aircraft, airport, over-the-road bus, bus station, passenger train and passenger railroad station operating within the United States.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATION

As outlined above, airlines and their employees take combatting human trafficking very seriously and are compliant with Federal regulations. Like many reporting policies, it is important that those reporting suspicious activity are not deterred or subject to the threat of frivolous litigation or retribution when the reporting is done in accordance with mandatory human trafficking training.

Current law provides immunity for reporting suspicious activity in the cases of air piracy, a threat to aircraft or passenger safety and terrorism, among others. To address this emerging human trafficking reporting concern, A4A recommends amending the Aviation Transportation Security Act (ATSA) (Pub. L. 107–71, codified at 49 U.S.C. § 44941) to include the voluntary reporting of human trafficking suspicious under the protection of immunity for reporting suspicious activities. We would be happy to work with the Task Force on a legislative proposal to explicitly correct this reporting deterrent.

CONCLUSION

A4A appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the hearing and this important topic, and we look forward to working with the Committee, Task Force and our government partners as the U.S. continues to prepare for these world class events.

Sincerely,

HALEY GALLAGHER,
Vice President of Security and Facilitation Airlines for America (A4A).

Mr. McCAUL. We are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us here today to discuss this important and sensitive topic. I ask that our witnesses please rise and raise their right hand.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you. Please be seated. Let the record reflect the witnesses have answered in the affirmative.

Now I would like to formally introduce our witnesses. First, Mr. Jonathan Thompson is the executive director and chief executive officer of the National Sheriff's Association, an organization that represents the interest of over 3,000 sheriffs in the United States and their deputies.

Ms. Courtney Litvak is the director of Survivor Leader Initiatives for No Trafficking Zone, a nonprofit dedicated to disrupting and dismantling human trafficking by advocating for the creation of No Trafficking Zones that implement high-risk penalties and crimes for predators that prey on children and adults. Ms. Litvak, as I mentioned, is a survivor of human trafficking and her advocacy has truly been extraordinary and incredible.

Ms. Yasmin Vafa is the cofounder and executive director of Rights4Girls. Her advocacy focuses on the intersection of race, gender, and systematic violence. Rights4Girls has driven key legislative reforms at all levels and raised national awareness around the criminalization and survivors of sexual violence.

Ms. Eliza McCoy is the vice president of programs and impact at the American Hotel and Lodging Association Foundation. In her role, she works to bolster and expand AHLA Foundation's programs to broaden impact, including No Room for Trafficking Initiative.

Ms. Meagan Lundstrom is a chief executive officer of Polaris, a role in which she leads national strategy operations and partnerships that integrate advocacy, research, and technology to prevent and disrupt trafficking. Her leadership has reinforced Polaris' role as a collaborative survivor-led thought partner, advancing intelligence, coordination, and field stewardship.

I want to thank all of you for being here today.

With that, I recognize Mr. Thompson for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JONATHAN THOMPSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL SHERIFF'S ASSOCIATION

Mr. THOMPSON. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Pou. I want to thank you both for leading this really important task force and I'm so honored to be here. I'm also happy to see that this is a bipartisan approach because we do need that.

Today I want to address a critical and often hidden danger that lurks amid the fun and excitement of some of our mass gatherings, human trafficking. These events, whether concerts, festivals, sporting events, they draw millions together in celebration, but, unfortunately, they create huge vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers. In the next few minutes we'll explore the risks of the world with examples, prevention strategies, and how each of us can play a role in safeguarding lives.

Mass gatherings amplify trafficking risks due to their scale, chaos, and, quite honestly, the unknowns. Crowds provide noisy cover for predators to spot, groom, and steal victims often, often, too often, vulnerable youth, runaways, or those seeking temporary work. High-traffic venues like stadiums, fairgrounds, and urban festivals see spikes in opportunities—in opportunistic crimes, excuse me. Traffickers are using the hustle and the bustle and distraction to drug drinks with ketamine, Valium, GHB, and other agents to coerce individuals into isolated areas or transport victims across State lines under the guise of event staffing.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security notes that events like the Super Bowl, FIFA Games, Summer Olympics, and big concerts have historically correlated with increased trafficking reports, with the sick criminals blending into the throng to sell victims for sex or forced labor. Consider that during the large-scale events, hotline calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline surge by up to 20 or even 30 percent in host cities.

Victims are frequently lured and promised VIP access with free tickets or jobs only to face coercion through debt, bondage, threats,

or violence. Domestically, post-event investigations reveal that hotel rooms turned into brothels and parking lots as handover points. These are not isolated incidents. These are patterns. They are enabled by transient populations and lacks oversight.

Prevention demands a multi-layered approach. Event organizers must train staff to see something, say something; protocols, spotting the signs like branded tattoos, malnourished individuals avoiding eye contact, or groups with mismatched ages and behaviors. Perhaps with law enforcement like the Blue Campaign, we can provide toolkits for secure ticketing, well-lit perimeters, and victim-centered reporting applications. Technology aid to facial recognition at entry points, an AI monitor, CCTV can flag anomalies without infringing privacy. Governments should mandate anti-trafficking clauses in event permits, while NGO's and law enforcement deploy mobile response teams.

On a different note, but similar, the sheriffs want to thank the committee and the House for including language in the NDAA that allows us with proper training and guardrails to mitigate drones at mass gatherings. Another safety initiative welcomed, very welcomed.

But change starts with us. I tell people you see a young person looking lost or controlled, approach safely and alert authorities via 1-888-373-7888. Let me repeat that, 888-373-7888. We should also work to gain accountability and good working relationships from the venues. All of us can help transport mass gatherings from Serengeti-like hunting grounds into safe, fun events as they're intended.

Mr. Chairman, I want to veer off topic for just 1 minute, if I may, and let the committee know that the sheriffs' president, association's president, Sheriff Chris West of Canadian County, Oklahoma, and I have been reviewing the drug boat missile strikes recently. It seems to us that anytime you keep drugs like cocaine and fentanyl from reaching American shores, then kinetic action is saving American lives. There is a connection. There is a connection to human trafficking. The cartels own it, they oversee it, they operate it, and they are relentless, relentless in how they approach things.

Thank you for your interest. We appreciate this. It is a growing problem, but we must focus on this. I cannot tell you how much the sheriffs appreciate your collective efforts. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Thompson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JONATHAN F. THOMPSON

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss proactive measures to safeguard mass events across the United States. As the Nation prepares to host unprecedented gatherings over the next 3 years—including 2026 FIFA World Cup matches, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and an expanding national calendar of large music festivals—our security posture must evolve to anticipate and counter emerging threats.

My testimony focuses on five areas: (1) Drug-facilitated crime and public safety, (2) biometric and facial recognition systems, (3) digital anti-human trafficking tools, (4) drone and counter-UAS operations, and (5) specialized training for local law enforcement and event personnel.

I. DRUG-FACILITATED CRIME AND PUBLIC SAFETY RISKS

Mass gatherings create ideal environments for exploitation through drug misuse, particularly substances such as ketamine, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), and emerging synthetic analogs, which can be colorless, tasteless, and fast-acting. These characteristics make them tools for sexual assault and robbery in dense, high-energy venues where early symptoms are difficult to distinguish from intoxication or fatigue.

At events like international soccer matches, Olympic celebrations, and festivals such as Coachella, Lollapalooza, and Electric Daisy Carnival, crowd dynamics can delay detection and reporting. To mitigate these risks, event security planning should incorporate:

- Field testing kits and portable spectrometers at checkpoints and backstage areas to detect ketamine, GHB, and similar agents in drinks or on surfaces.
- Public education campaigns, including signage and mobile alerts, warning about drink-spiking risks and directing attendees to on-site medical and reporting stations.
- Interdisciplinary response teams where medical personnel and law enforcement are trained together to recognize symptoms, preserve evidence, and support survivors.

These actions would shorten response times and improve case outcomes for drug-facilitated assaults at large events.

II. ADVANCING FACIAL RECOGNITION AND BIOMETRIC SYSTEMS

Upcoming FIFA matches, the Los Angeles Olympics, and large-scale fan zones will draw millions of spectators, dignitaries, and workers into dense urban areas, making identity management and perimeter control paramount. Facial recognition and AI-enabled video analytics can help identify persons of interest, detect restricted-area breaches, and verify credentials, but deployment must be consistent with Constitutional protections and privacy safeguards.

Policy recommendations include:

- Creating and maintaining a DHS-approved list of biometric systems that meet accuracy, demographic fairness, and cybersecurity standards suitable for dynamic mass-event environments.
- Ensuring secure, role-based integration of facial recognition alerts with DHS fusion centers and FBI databases, limited to specific, event-related objectives.
- Mandating strict data minimization, including short, predefined retention windows and independent audit logs, so data are deleted after the operational need ends.

These measures would enhance situational awareness at stadiums and fan zones while preserving public trust.

III. DIGITAL ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING TOOLS

International events and large music festivals can increase vulnerability to sex and labor trafficking, as traffickers exploit transient workforces, informal lodging, and large anonymous crowds. Federal campaigns and task forces already provide training and awareness tools to help law enforcement and first responders recognize trafficking indicators and respond appropriately, and similar approaches can be embedded into mass-event planning.

Key strategies are:

- Deploying AI-driven tools to analyze on-line advertising, payment patterns, and communications that may indicate trafficking activity in host cities before and during events.
- Installing multilingual digital kiosks and secure mobile portals at venues, transportation hubs, and fan zones so victims or witnesses can seek help anonymously and be quickly connected with trained responders.
- Enhancing secure data-sharing and evidence management among Federal agencies and local task forces, using modern, auditable systems that protect privacy while maintaining chain of custody.

Applying these tools to World Cup host cities, Olympic venues, and festival locations would strengthen efforts to identify victims and disrupt trafficking networks linked to large events.

IV. DRONE SECURITY AND COUNTER-UAS OPERATIONS

Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) have become integral for aerial broadcasting, crowd monitoring, and logistics, but unauthorized drones pose risks ranging from airborne hazards to hostile surveillance and potential weaponization. Security plan-

ners for the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympics are already emphasizing the need to expand counter-UAS authority and capabilities for State and local partners under Federal oversight.

To address this threat, Congress and DHS should:

- Support use of flexible temporary flight restrictions and geo-fenced air space around stadiums, fan festivals, and training facilities, coordinated with the FAA and local authorities.
- Invest in layered detection systems combining radio-frequency sensing, radar, and optical tracking to distinguish authorized broadcast or safety drones from unauthorized incursions.
- Expand counter-UAS training and technical assistance for qualified State and local law enforcement, under a Federal legal framework that protects lawful aviation and communications systems.

These steps will help prevent malicious or careless drone activity from disrupting high-profile matches, ceremonies, and outdoor concerts.

V. STRENGTHENING LOCAL TRAINING AND COORDINATION

Technology alone cannot secure mass events without trained personnel who can interpret data and act quickly. Security preparations for the World Cup and Olympics already involve close coordination among Federal agencies, State agencies, and local police, highlighting the importance of sustained training, exercises, and clear roles.

Recommended actions include:

- Developing a national “Mass Event Security and Response” curriculum through the Department of Homeland Security that covers drug-facilitated crimes, biometrics, counter-UAS operations, and human trafficking, with modules tailored to stadiums, fan festivals, and music events.
- Aligning Federal grant guidance so States and localities can prioritize funding for technology integration, multi-agency exercises, and specialized training connected to upcoming FIFA matches, Olympic events, and major festivals.
- Requiring standardized after-action reports for Federally-supported events, capturing threat incidents, technology performance, interagency coordination successes, and lessons learned in a central repository.

Institutionalizing this knowledge will improve readiness not just for one tournament or festival season, but for all future large-scale events.

CONCLUSION

The United States is entering a period of exceptional global visibility as it prepares for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and a sustained boom in large music festivals and other mass gatherings. These events showcase national strengths and community spirit, but they also present attractive targets for those who would exploit crowds, technologies, and complex logistics.

By integrating advanced detection of drugs like ketamine and GHB, responsible use of facial recognition, modern digital anti-trafficking tools, robust counter-drone capabilities, and comprehensive training for local law enforcement and event staff, the Nation can significantly reduce risk while preserving the openness and celebration that define these occasions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership on this critical set of issues.

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

I now recognize Ms. Litvak for 5 minutes to summarize her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF COURTNEY LITVAK, DIRECTOR OF SURVIVOR LEADER INITIATIVES, NO TRAFFICKING ZONE

Ms. LITVAK. Thank you to the Members of this critical task force and primarily to Chairman McCaul, who is a dear ally of mine for many years, and also to Ranking Member Pou. My name is Courtney Litvak and I am honored to be here today to testify about the scourge against humanity, particularly addressing human trafficking at mass gatherings. I am representing the No Trafficking Zone and all of the victims and survivors just like me. I pray my

testimony will help you understand how and why money, power, control, and lack of truth of this sophisticated crime are imposing destruction and brokenness throughout our Nation.

The annual global profits from forced labor and forced sexual exploitation have risen to over an estimated \$236 billion. Today I will highlight some of the devastating effects human trafficking has on its millions of victims and their families as well as the human heart and soul.

I also want to focus on the contributing factors and intersections of increased human trafficking during mass gatherings and events, including but not limited to FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, and the Olympics. NTZ is a nonpartisan nonprofit whose mission is to prevent, combat, and eradicate human trafficking by creating No Trafficking Zones throughout the world. This takes survivor-led solutions, unity, and mobilization, trauma-informed training, intelligence gathering, legislation, and victim-centered education.

No Trafficking Zone dismantles human trafficking by breaking it down into identifiable markets, building and informing operational models and task forces that implement tangible real-world solutions. One of those major markets sits at the intersection of sports, entertainment, and sex and labor trafficking.

In 2020, the NTZ Game Over Initiative was launched at NRG Park in Houston, Texas, the busiest stadium and sports entertainment complex in America. Hosting more than 6 million visitors annually, NRG Park became the first certified No Trafficking Zone sports and entertainment venue in the world. Today some of NRG Park initiatives with No Trafficking and Zone include our updated survivor-led signage that was recently unveiled throughout the venue in both English and Spanish.

This NTZ Game Over Initiative model turns a stadium and massive event venue from a passive location into an active deterrence and response versus reactive environment to prevent and combat human trafficking in all of its forms. NTZ is also training other States and sports stadiums to become No Trafficking Zones alongside our national-led Survivor Sports Committee. No Trafficking Zone is honored to partner and work closely with our incredible impact partners, such as HIDTA, Harris County Sheriff's Office, HSI, DEA, National Child ID, and many more.

No Trafficking Zone does not operate in isolation. We help build and support multiagency task forces that bring local, State, and Federal partners to dismantle organized crime and transnational networks. NTZ serves as the human trafficking coordinator for HIDTA, a high-intensity drug trafficking area task force that integrates local, State, Federal law enforcement agencies. Through the Game Over Initiative, NTZ works directly with HIDTA intelligence analysts that track trafficking trends surrounding major gaming events. An example, earlier this month, our analysts tracked over 600 live illicit sex advertisements during a local NFL game.

National hotline data and law enforcement reporting consistently show increased enforced labor procurement and sex trafficking activity surrounding major sporting events and mass gatherings. The NTZ Game Over Initiative has received national recognition, including earlier this year the NFL Alumni Association and Pro Football Hall of Fame bestowed to our unwavering CEO Jacquelyn

Aluotto. NTZ also serves as the FIFA Human Rights Committee, on that committee in Houston, Texas, where we are actively training law enforcement and partners.

Now, survivor leadership is so important. It is embedded in every single NTZ model. Survivors like myself understand grooming, coercion, recruitment, and movement patterns better than anyone else and than traditional security models can identify.

I myself went from being sex trafficked by a Romeo and gorilla pimp during the 2017 Super Bowl in NRG Park's parking lot and surrounding hotels to working with NTZ and the Harris County Task Force at NRG Park to combat the very crime that once ensnared me. One heartbreaking incident I will never forget occurred just hours after I physically ran for my life. Following nearly 3 years of being trafficked, I was reunited with my family. As surreal as that was, I remember seeing my dad running toward me in the airport terminal, only for him to run right past me. He did not recognize his own daughter. I was so severely emaciated and badly injured that I was truly unrecognizable.

Less than 2 weeks later, I met one of the most remarkable leaders and fathers who had been searching for me and praying for my safe return home, Congressman Michael McCaul. I went from being one of his constituents to being groomed and sex trafficked from my own high school in his district. I will never forget Congressman McCaul and my angel Larissa coming to check on me, sitting with me, talking with me, and listening for hours at my childhood church. He can attest to both my profound physical and psychological scars. But I was alive and I was finally home.

I remember wondering if it was real. Could I truly be here telling the congressman about what I had just escaped from narrowly surviving? That is how immensely blessed I feel to be sitting here before you all today. I am blessed. I am a child of God. I am a miracle.

I escaped, but so many others have not, like all of the experts here sitting alongside me know. Many have lost their lives to this evil. At times, the enemy tries to burden me with survivor's guilt, but God reminds me to look the devil in the face and declare, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is being done now, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20, my life verse. I stand before you today, not bearing the outward appearance of the horrors I endured, as many survivors do not. But because of the blood of Jesus, I am reborn, no longer made in my trafficker's image, but in his.

This is the true nature of the battle we face if we hope to come close to eradicating human trafficking in our Nation and world. As Scripture reminds us, be strong in the Lord, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces of evil. Therefore, just as God saved and spoke to me, I urge you all, put on the full armor of God. Do not be afraid. Victims need to know that they are not alone, just as I did and was reminded of that. We all fall short of His glory. I know I do. But His grace and mercy are sufficient.

Therefore, human trafficking at large and mass gatherings and events is not inevitable. It is preventable and combatable. I am proof of this. When we treat sports and entertainment venues as

trafficking markets, build an informed task force, collaborate with Federal law enforcement, integrate intelligence and center survivor leadership, we move from awareness to action and from reaction to prevention.

Let us all work together to hold stakeholders accountable in order to make FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, and the Olympics and all mass gatherings No Trafficking Zones. Thank you all for letting me share my heart with you and for your leadership and your commitment to addressing what truly is a scourge against humanity. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Litvak follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF COURTNEY LITVAK

DECEMBER 17, 2025

Dear Chairman McCaul, and Members of the Task Force: Thank you to the Members of this critical Task Force and to Chairman Michael McCaul. I am honored to be here today to testify about the Scourge Against Humanity: Addressing Human Trafficking at Mass Gatherings. I am representing No Trafficking Zone, Inc (NTZ) and all the victims and survivors just like me. I pray my testimony will help you understand how and why money, power, control and lack of truth of this sophisticated crime are imposing destruction and brokenness throughout our Nation. The annual global profits from forced labour and forced sexual exploitation have risen to over an estimated \$236 billion. Today, I will highlight the devastating effects human trafficking has on its millions of victims and their families, as well as the human heart and soul. I also want to focus on the contributing factors, indicators, and intersections of increased human trafficking during mass gatherings and special events including but not limited to: FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, and the Olympics.

NTZ is a non-partisan, non-profit whose mission is to prevent, combat, and eradicate human trafficking by creating no trafficking zones throughout the world. This takes survivor-led solutions, unity, mobilization, trauma-informed training, collaboration, intelligence gathering and dissemination, legislation, and victim-centered education.

No Trafficking Zone dismantles human trafficking by breaking it down into identifiable markets, building and informing operational models and task forces that implement tangible, real-world solutions.

One of those major markets sits at the intersection of sports, entertainment, and sex and labor trafficking.

NRG PARK'S COMMITMENT TO PREVENTING AND COMBATTING TRAFFICKING

In 2020, the NTZ Game Over Initiative was launched at NRG Park in Houston, Texas, the busiest stadium and sports and entertainment complex in America, hosting more than 6 million visitors annually.

NRG Park became the first certified No Trafficking Zone sports and entertainment venue in the world.

Today, NRG Park includes:

- Updated survivor-led signage was recently unveiled throughout the venue in both English and Spanish
- NTZ first created and embedded a human trafficking response team and resources inside stadium operations including but not limited to: Houston Texan's home games, the NCAA Championships, and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.
- Active coordination with local, tribal, State, and Federal law enforcement partners.
- Direct collaboration with NRG Park security teams during large events.

This NTZ Game Over Initiative model turns a stadium and massive event venue from a passive location into an active deterrence and response vs reactive environment to prevent and combat human trafficking in all its forms. NTZ is also training other States and sports stadiums to become No Trafficking Zones.

Alongside our National Survivor Led Sports Committee, No Trafficking Zone is honored to partner and work closely with our incredible impact partners such as: HIDTA, the Harris County Sheriff's Office, HSI, DEA, Child ID/Amber Alerts, US Marshalls, and the FBI.

BUILDING TASK FORCES AND COORDINATING WITH HIDTA

No Trafficking Zone does not operate in isolation. We help build and support multi-agency task forces that bring together local, State, and Federal partners to dismantle organized crime and transnational networks.

NTZ serves as the Human Trafficking Coordinator for Houston HIDTA, a High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task force that integrates local, State, and Federal law enforcement agencies. This coordination allows trafficking to be targeted alongside drug trafficking, gang activity, and money laundering rather than in silos.

Through the Game Over Initiative, NTZ works directly with HIDTA intelligence analysts who track trafficking trends surrounding major games and events, and movement patterns. Earlier this month, our analysts tracked over 600+ live illicit sex advertisements during a local NFL game.

By merging HIDTA's intelligence capabilities with survivor-informed field operations and venue security, trafficking pipelines can be identified and disrupted in real time.

WHAT THE DATA AND SURVIVORS TEACH US AT LARGE EVENTS AND SPORTS—SEX AND LABOR TRAFFICKING INTERSECTION

National hotline data and law enforcement reporting consistently show increases in forced labor procurement and sex trafficking activity surrounding major sporting events and mass gatherings.

These factors include but are not limited to:

- Spikes in on-line sex advertisements timed to games, tournaments, and large events.
- Increased movement of victims through hotels, ride shares, parking infrastructure, and entertainment districts.
- Elevated risk for minors, particularly through on-line grooming and peer-on-peer recruitment including through social media.
- Construction projects and vendors for stadiums and event venues or infrastructure upgrades may involve migrant or temporary labor subject to coercion or exploitative conditions.

These patterns confirm what survivors and investigators know: sports and entertainment venues are a trafficking market that requires intentional intervention and oversight at all levels.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

The NTZ Game Over Initiative has received national recognition, including an award this year from the NFL Alumni Association and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, bestowed to our unwavering and fearless CEO Jacquelyn Aluotto.

NTZ also serves on the FIFA Human Rights Committee in Houston, Texas, where we are actively training law enforcement and partners in preparation for FIFA events.

In addition, No Trafficking Zone has presented this stadium model to the White House and the Department of Homeland Security, where we were asked whether the model could be replicated nationally.

SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP AS A PUBLIC SAFETY STRATEGY

Survivor leadership is embedded into every NTZ model. Survivors understand grooming, coercion, recruitment, and movement patterns better than anyone else and that traditional security models often miss.

Survivors are not stories or just statistics. They are strategic experts whose insight strengthens prevention, identification, and response.

MY PERSONAL TESTIMONY AND SURVIVOR STORY

I myself went from being sex trafficked by a romance and guerrilla pimp during the February 2017 Super Bowl in NRG Park's parking lot and surrounding hotels, to working with NTZ and the HCSO Task Force at NRG Park to combat the very crime that once ensnared me. I've had the privilege of working with the White House and Members of Congress, training and educating thousands across the country, and now sit before you today to put a face to this crime and remind you why we do what we do.

Victims of sex trafficking, including myself, come face to face with some of the darkest and most corrupt and demon-possessed individuals imaginable, violent offenders, buyers of the most vulnerable, including children, pedophiles, kidnappers, murderers, and psychopaths. In trafficking, you see the depth of evil and terror human beings are capable of inflicting on one another.

One heartbreaking incident I will never forget occurred just hours after I physically ran for my life following nearly 3 years of being trafficked. I was reunited with my family. As surreal as that moment was, I remember seeing my dad running toward me in the airport terminal, only for him to run right past me. He did not recognize his own daughter. I was so severely emaciated and badly injured that I was truly unrecognizable.

Less than 2 weeks later, I met one of the most remarkable leaders and fathers who had been searching for me and praying for my safe return home: Congressman Michael McCaul. I went from being one of his constituents to being groomed and sex trafficked from my high school in his district. I will never forget Congressman McCaul and my angel Larissa Plunto coming to check on me, sitting with me, talking with me, and listening to me for hours at my childhood church. He can attest to both my profound physical and psychological scars. But I was alive, and I was finally home.

I remember wondering if it was real, could I truly be here, telling the Congressman about what I had just escaped from after narrowly surviving? That is how immensely blessed I feel to be sitting before you today. I am blessed. I am a child of God. I am a miracle. I escaped. But so many others have not, or have lost their lives to this evil.

At times, the enemy tries to burden me with survivor's guilt, but God reminds me to look the devil in the face and declare: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). This truth reflects God's sovereignty and His ability to transform human evil and suffering into divine purpose. We must lead by example, as He does, through forgiveness, redemption, and hope.

Like many victims, my traffickers threatened my life countless times and threatened my family, especially if I ever left or told the truth about what they did to me and the other girls. They destroy lives and families and lead through intimidation and fear. My traffickers even told me they were my God, as many traffickers operate with a delusional savior complex. Contrary to what traffickers program victims to believe, it is only by grace through faith that we are saved (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is God's unconditional favor, love, and power, a gift that cannot be earned.

I thought I had accepted Jesus into my heart when I was younger, yet it was in the depths of true hell that God met me exactly where I was. My Heavenly Father was the only one who could reach me in my most sunken place. He was with me in the pit (With a Lion On A Snowy Day), teaching me to unlearn fear, face it, and run for my life, to reclaim my voice and my future.

I stand before you today not bearing the outward appearance of the horrors I endured. Because of the blood of Yeshua, I am reborn, no longer made in my traffickers' image, but in His. This is the true nature of the battle we face if we hope to eradicate human trafficking in our nation and world. As Scripture reminds us: "Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power . . . For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Therefore, just as God saved and spoke to me, I urge you to put on the full armor of God. Do not be afraid. Victims need to know they are not alone. We all fall short of His glory, I know I do, but His grace and mercy are SUFFICIENT.

As echoed in my beloved favorite story, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, after anguish and captivity, the realization comes that God's justice and vengeance is far greater than our own. In the end, the declaration is clear and I believe it with all of my heart and soul: "God will give me justice."

CLOSING REMARKS

Human trafficking at large and at mass gatherings and events is not inevitable, it is preventable and combatable.

When we treat sports and entertainment venues as trafficking markets, build and inform task forces, collaborate with Federal law enforcement, integrate intelligence, and center survivor leadership, we move from awareness to action and from reaction to prevention.

Let us all work together and hold stakeholders accountable to the best of our abilities in order to make FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, the Olympics, and all mass gatherings—No Trafficking Zones!

Thank you for letting me share my heart with you all and for your leadership and your commitment to addressing what truly is a scourge against humanity.

God Bless.



NRG Park to Reaffirm Its Role as the World's First No Trafficking Zone Sports and Entertainment Complex





THIS IS A NO TRAFFICKING ZONE

love shouldn't hurt or control



Traffickers rarely abduct strangers. They pose as friends or partners, gaining trust to trap victims. What feels safe can quickly turn into control, abuse, and exploitation, often before victims realize what's happening.

It's not your fault



YOU MAY BE A VICTIM OR KNOW A VICTIM:

- IF YOU ARE NOT FREE TO LEAVE OR MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS.
- IF YOU DO NOT HAVE CONTROL OVER YOUR MONEY OR PERSONAL DOCUMENTS.
- IF YOU ARE FORCED TO PROVIDE LABOR OR SEX ACTS.
- IF YOU WERE RECRUITED OR TRICKED INTO A JOB UNDER FALSE PROMISES.
- IF YOU ARE INVOLVED IN THE COMMERCIAL SEX INDUSTRY.

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW NEEDS HELP CALL THE NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE AT 1-888-373-7888, TEXT HELP TO 233733, OR USE THE LIVE CHAT AT [HELPSHUMANTRAFFICKINGHOTLINE.ORG](https://helpshumantraffickinghotline.org)




ESTA ES UNA ZONA LIBRE DE TRAFICANTES

El amor no debe doler ni controlar



Los traficantes rara vez secuestran a desconocidos. Se hacen pasar por amigos o parejas, ganando confianza para atrapar a las víctimas. Lo que parece seguro puede convertirse rápidamente en control, abuso y explotación, a menudo antes de que las víctimas se den cuenta.

No es tu culpa

PUEDES SER UNA VÍCTIMA O CONOCER A UNA VÍCTIMA:

- SI NO ERES LIBRE DE IRTE O TOMAR TUS PROPIAS DECISIONES.
- SI NO TIENES CONTROL SOBRE TU DINERO O TUS DOCUMENTOS PERSONALES.
- SI TE OBLIGAN A TRABAJAR O A REALIZAR ACTOS SEXUALES.
- SI FUERTE RECLUTADO/A O ENGAÑADO/A PARA UN TRABAJO CON PROMESAS FALSAS.
- SI ESTÁS INVOLUCRADO/A EN LA INDUSTRIA DEL SEXO COMERCIAL.

SI TÚ O ALGUIEN QUE CONOCES NECESITA AYUDA, LLAMA A LA LÍNEA NACIONAL CONTRA LA TRATA DE PERSONAS AL 1-888-373-7888, ENVA HELP AL 233733 O USA EL CHAT EN HELP.HUMANTRAFFICKINGHOTLINE.ORG

NTZ **nrg park**

NO TRAFICKING ZONE

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you, Courtney. As an eyewitness to the scars of your survivorship, I can't tell you how proud I am of who you have become.

I next recognize Ms. Vafa for 5 minutes to summarize her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF YASMIN VAFA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
RIGHTS4GIRLS**

Ms. VAFA. Thank you, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and Members of the task force for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Yasmin Vafa. I'm the executive director of Rights4Girls, a national organization dedicated to ending violence against young women and girls. We work alongside survivors to strengthen laws, advance research, train judges and systems professionals, and shift the culture that enables exploitation.

This hearing could not be more timely. In the coming years, the United States will host some of the world's largest sporting events, including the FIFA World Cup and the Summer Olympics. These events bring complex security challenges and, among them, human trafficking must be a chief concern.

Sex trafficking exists today in every community: rural, suburban, Tribal, and urban. Vulnerable people, primarily women and children, are bought and sold with near total impunity. A recent *New York Times* investigation exposed the brutal reality on Los Angeles's Figueroa Street where child sex trafficking persists openly. Girls like Ana, who was first trafficked here at 13 alongside her 11-year-old sister. Today at 19, missing her front teeth and living with an ostomy bag, Ana is still forced to meet a daily quota or face violent punishment. Her story reflects the trauma endured by countless women and girls in the sex trade.

The data is stark. Over 90 percent of women report being shot, raped, strangled, or beaten, often by sex buyers. They face a mortality rate 200 times higher than the general population, and 68

percent suffer PTSD at levels comparable to combat veterans. These harms predate and outlast any special event. But when you add an influx of tourists, anonymity, and large numbers of men with disposable income, the risk of trafficking intensifies.

Major events create a perfect storm: increased hotel bookings, rentals, ride shares, and festivities, along with the surge in the commercial sex market. While sex buying happens every day, large events concentrate demand, making exploitation easier and more profitable. History bears this out. During one Final Four weekend in Minneapolis, law enforcement arrested 47 men for felony solicitation of a child, 11 for trafficking, and recovered 28 victims, including 1 child. During an MLB All-Star game in Cleveland, 49 people were arrested, including 28 men seeking sex with children. Before Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta, 26 traffickers and 34 men attempting to buy sex with children were arrested and several children recovered. The pattern is unmistakable: where demand spikes, traffickers follow.

Recognizing this, Rights4Girls launched our Sex Buying Isn't a Game national billboard campaign in 8 States hosting the NCAA March Madness and MLB All-Star games. The campaign exposes the often invisible role of sex buyers in fueling trafficking and seeks to disrupt demand. During this year's Final Four in San Antonio, while our campaign was running, 8 trafficking victims were recovered, underscoring the need for proactive deterrence.

The sex trade is a multi-billion-dollar industry funded entirely by buyers. Without buyers, there is no business. Our recent report, *Buyers Unmasked*, analyzed hundreds of posts from on-line hobby boards, essentially Yelp pages for prostitution, and revealed a culture of dehumanization and entitlement that traffickers rely on.

One survivor told us she spent 6 months at age 16 telling every buyer she was being trafficked against her will. Not one of them helped her. Every man prioritized his own protection or the money he'd paid. This is the norm, not the exception. As one buyer in our report stated, the goal is find them, F them, forget them. This mindset is the invisible engine of trafficking at mass gatherings.

If we're serious about preventing trafficking at major events, our policies must address the true driver of this harm: the demand created by sex buyers. To that end, we recommend, No.1, targeting the demand. Prioritize deterrence operations focused on buyers at large events as a form of trafficking prevention. Mandate all Federally-funded programs to reduce trafficking include demand reduction tactics.

No. 2, supporting survivors. Ensure all recovered victims, children, and adults, are never criminalized and are immediately connected to comprehensive trauma-informed services.

No. 3, promoting accountability. Pass and enforce laws that hold all exploiters accountable, using buyer fines to fund services, mandating buyer accountability programs that shift mindsets, and enhancing penalties against those driving the trafficking market. This year we worked with survivors to pass such laws in California and New Hampshire.

When the stadium lights dim and fans pour onto the streets, no one should be treated as entertainment or sport. The evidence is

clear. The solutions are known. What remains is our courage to act. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Vafa follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF YASMIN VAFA

DECEMBER 17, 2025

Thank you, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and Members of the Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States, for inviting me to speak at this important hearing on human trafficking at mass gatherings. My name is Yasmin Vafa and I am the executive director of Rights4Girls, a national organization dedicated to ending violence against vulnerable young women and girls in the United States. We work alongside survivors to strengthen State and Federal laws, advance research, provide training to judges and systems professionals, and conduct public awareness campaigns to dismantle the conditions that enable exploitation. Our mission is simple: to ensure every girl can grow up safe and free from violence.

This hearing could not be more timely. Over the next several years, the United States will host some of the world's largest sporting events—including the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and the 2031 FIFA Women's World Cup. These events bring complex security challenges, and among them, the humanitarian crisis of human trafficking must be a chief concern.

TRAFFICKING IS ALREADY HERE—AND HAPPENS WITH IMPUNITY

Sex trafficking is not a distant threat that appears only during major events. It exists today in every community across this country—rural, suburban, Tribal, and urban. Vulnerable people, primarily women and children, are bought and sold for profit and pleasure, often with near-total impunity. A recent *New York Times* investigation exposed the brutal reality on Los Angeles's Figueroa Street, where child sex trafficking persists openly.¹ Girls like Ana, who was first trafficked on Figueroa at age 13 alongside her 11-year-old sister. Today, at 19—missing her front teeth and living with an ostomy bag—she is still forced to meet a \$1,200 daily quota or face violent punishment at the hands of her exploiter.² Her story reflects the trauma endured by countless women and girls in the sex trade. The data is stark:

- Over 90 percent of women in the sex trade report being shot, raped, strangled, or beaten—often at the hands of sex buyers.³
- They face a mortality rate 200 times higher than the general population.⁴
- 68 percent suffer PTSD at levels comparable to combat veterans.⁵

These harms predate and outlast any special event. But when you add the mass influx of tourists, temporary anonymity, and large numbers of men with disposable income, the risk of trafficking and exploitation intensifies dramatically.

MAJOR EVENTS CREATE A TEMPORARY MARKET WHERE TRAFFICKING THRIVES

Events like the World Cup, Olympics, March Madness, or the Super Bowl create a perfect storm: increased hotel bookings, short-term rentals, ride shares, and festivities—along with a surge in the commercial sex market. While sex buying happens daily across America, major events concentrate the demand, making exploitation easier and more profitable.

History bears this out:

¹ *Can Anyone Rescue the Trafficked Girls of L.A.'s Figueroa Street?*, *N.Y. Times* (Oct. 26, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/26/magazine/sex-trafficking-girls-la-figueroa.html>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Jody Raphael and Katie Feifer, "Get the Facts: What We Know about Sex Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution in the United States," (World Without Exploitation, January 2020), <https://www.equalitymodelus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Get-the-Facts-January-2020.pdf>.

⁴ John J. Potterat et al., "Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women," *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 159, no. 8 (April 15, 2004): 778–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwh110>.

⁵ Melissa Farley et al., "Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2, no. 3–4 (2004): 33–74, https://doi.org/10.1300/J189v02n03_03.

- During one Final Four weekend in Minneapolis, law enforcement arrested 47 men for felony solicitation of a minor, 11 for trafficking or promoting prostitution, and recovered 28 trafficking victims, including a child.⁶
- During an MLB All-Star Game in Cleveland, 49 people were arrested, including 28 men seeking sex with children.⁷
- Before Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta, 26 traffickers and 34 men attempting to buy sex with children were arrested, and multiple child victims were recovered.⁸
- In Phoenix in 2023, police made roughly 50 felony arrests tied to trafficking during Super Bowl LVI.⁹

The pattern is unmistakable: where demand spikes, traffickers follow.

ADDRESSING THE REAL DRIVER: DEMAND

Recognizing the clear link between sex buying and exploitation, Rights4Girls launched our Sex Buying Isn't a Game national billboard campaign in 8 States hosting the NCAA March Madness games and MLB All-Star Game. The campaign exposes the often invisible role of sex buyers in fueling sex trafficking and seeks to disrupt demand. During the 2025 NCAA Final Four in San Antonio—while our campaign was running—8 trafficking victims were recovered,¹⁰ underscoring the need for proactive awareness and deterrence—and illustrating what can be accomplished when NGO's, the media, and law enforcement come together.

We must remember: the sex trade is a multi-billion-dollar industry funded entirely by sex buyers. Without buyers, there is no business. Our recent report, *Buyers Unmasked*, analyzed hundreds of posts from on-line hobby boards—essentially Yelp pages for prostitution—and reveals a culture of dehumanization, indifference, and entitlement that traffickers rely on.¹¹

One survivor told us she spent 6 months at age 16 trying to tell her buyers she was being trafficked against her will. Not one buyer helped her. Every man prioritized his own protection or the money he had already paid.

This is the norm—not the exception.

As one buyer in our report openly stated, the goal is: “Find them, f* them, forget them. This is the gold standard for men’s spiritual health.”¹²

This mindset is the invisible engine of trafficking at mass gatherings.

POLICY MUST FOCUS ON THE SOURCE OF THE HARM

If we are serious about preventing trafficking during major events—and year-round—our policies must address the true driver of this harm: the demand created by sex buyers.

To that end, we recommend:

1. *Target the Demand*

Prioritize deterrence operations focused on sex buyers during large events as a form of trafficking and violence prevention. To ensure the prevention of sex trafficking year-round, we must mandate that all Federally-funded programs to reduce human trafficking include demand reduction tactics. We have seen the success of these approaches in other jurisdictions across the United States and the globe.

2. *Support Survivors*

Ensure that recovered victims are never criminalized and are immediately connected to comprehensive, trauma-informed services, whether they be children or adults. We must remember that many of the adults in the sex trade today, are

⁶U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *Twin Cities-area child sex trafficking sting nets 47 arrests during ‘Final Four’ weekend* (Apr. 10, 2019), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/twin-cities-area-child-sex-trafficking-sting-nets-47-arrests-during-final-four>.

⁷Associated Press, *Authorities: 49 arrests on sex counts during All-Star week* (Jul. 11, 2019), <https://apnews.com/general-news-a41d30bce6c149a1abfde006224853fb>.

⁸Federal Bureau of Investigations, *FBI announces results of human trafficking operation for Super Bowl LIII* (Feb. 5, 2019), <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/atlanta/news/press-releases/fbi-announces-results-of-human-trafficking-operation-for-sbliii>.

⁹AZ Central, *Sex trafficking sting operation in Arizona during Super Bowl leads to multiple arrests* (Feb. 26, 2023), <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2023/02/26/multiple-arrests-made-in-sex-trafficking-sting-during-super-bowl/69942519007/>.

¹⁰Associated Press, *Human Trafficking in San Antonio During Final Four a Real Problem, Officials Say*, KENS 5 (Apr. 6, 2018), <https://www.kens5.com/article/news/crime/final-four-human-trafficking-san-antonio-arrests/273-6f774742-f1e6-4856-83cf-3d2becb7bffa>.

¹¹Rights4Girls, *Buyers Unmasked: Exposing the Men Who Buy Sex & Solutions to End Exploitation* (Jan. 2025), <https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Buyers-Unmasked-02122025.pdf>.

¹²*Ibid.*

the child sex trafficking victims of yesterday who have merely come of age in this industry and are in need of the same services and support.

3. Promote Accountability

Pass and enforce laws that hold all exploiters accountable, both sex buyers and traffickers—using buyer fines to fund survivor services, mandating buyer accountability programs that shift mindsets and culture, and enhancing penalties against those driving the sex trafficking market. It is crucial to hold all exploiters accountable for the devastating harm they inflict on victims and our communities.

Just this year, Rights4Girls worked with survivors and partners to pass laws in States like California¹³ and New Hampshire¹⁴ increasing penalties on buyers and generating funding for survivors. The models exist. What we need now is the political will to implement them.

A CALL TO ACTION

When the stadium lights dim and fans pour into the streets, no woman, no child, and no member of the surrounding community should be treated as entertainment or collateral damage.

These global events present an opportunity—not only to protect potential victims, but to expose the reality of sex-buying and the role it plays in fueling this multi-billion-dollar industry. Our report, *Buyers Unmasked*, lays bare the attitudes and actions of sex buyers in their own words. Their statements shatter the false narrative that buying sex is a victimless act. What emerges instead is a pattern of misogyny, dehumanization, and deliberate disregard for signs of coercion, vulnerability, and desperation.

The evidence is clear. The solutions are known. What remains is our courage to act.

Thank you for your attention and your commitment to protecting the most vulnerable among us.

Mr. McCaul. Ms. Vafa, let me just comment as well. As a former Federal prosecutor, for too long the victims were treated as the criminals and not the criminals. I think we have changed that to a large extent. Thank you for offering that. We need to continue to raise that awareness.

The Chairman now recognizes Ms. McCoy for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ELIZA MCCOY, VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAMS & IMPACT, AMERICAN HOTEL AND LODGING ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION

Ms. McCoy. Good afternoon, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and distinguished Members of the Task Force. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the lodging industry's efforts to prevent human trafficking as we prepare for major events that will draw millions of international visitors to the United States.

My name is Eliza McCoy and I serve as vice president of programs and impact at the American Hotel and Lodging Association Foundation, where I lead our human trafficking awareness and prevention initiatives. I'm proud to be here today with valuable partners from the National Sheriff's Association, Rights4Girls, Polaris, and No Trafficking Zone, many of whom I've worked with previously.

Before joining AHLA, I spent more than 15 years in law enforcement and nonprofit leadership, focused on public safety and child protection. As an investigator in a District Attorney's Office, and later leading outreach, training, and prevention efforts at the National Center for Missing Exploited Children, I've seen the devastating realities of this crime up close. I've devoted my career to

¹³ California AB 379, <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB379/id/3263490>.

¹⁴ New Hampshire SB 267, <https://legiscan.com/NH/text/SB267/id/3159427>.

this issue and to helping survivors overcome their trauma. Now I have the privilege of working for an industry where preventing human trafficking is both a core value and a collective effort.

With the United States set to host the FIFA World Cup, America 250, the Summer Olympics and Paralympics, as well as other major events over the next few years, we face both a challenge and an opportunity. Large events often draw attention to human trafficking, but more importantly, they represent a critical moment to turn heightened awareness into long-term strategies that protect vulnerable people year-round, not just during major gatherings. We can show on the world stage how our actions are leading a human trafficking response and prevention, both nation-wide and across the globe.

In 2019, the lodging industry came together to launch No Room for Trafficking, a comprehensive initiative developed in partnership with our member companies, dedicated leaders, law enforcement partners, and expert organizations. For the last 5 years, this national initiative has translated that commitment into action with shared goals and standards aligned with best practices in the anti-trafficking field.

Our mission is threefold: elevate awareness of human trafficking, educate lodging employees to identify and report it, and equip survivors with the support they need to thrive. A cornerstone of this initiative is a tailored training program developed by Marriott International in collaboration with expert NGO's, which we make available for use across the industry. Since 2020, this training has been completed more than 2.5 million times. It's provided at no cost to any hotel employee or interested individual and is offered in 34 different languages, ensuring that workers at every property can receive this important education from resorts to motels. Our message is clear. We are dedicated to the safety of our communities where we all work and live.

To maximize the impact of these upcoming events and build lasting change, we recommend three key actions. First, support consistent standards for training and anti-trafficking policies not just in the lodging industry, but across all sectors, ensuring no weak links and prevention efforts. The lodging industry's anti-trafficking commitment can model for other industries how collective action creates stronger safeguards and better outcomes.

Second, support streamlined reporting processes that effectively leverage the resources of both law enforcement and survivor advocacy organizations.

Third, invest more government and community resources in long-term solutions, including emergency housing for victims and specialized law enforcement units to strengthen community readiness for years to come. With these improvements in place, the lodging industry can remain a strong and reliable partner in anti-trafficking efforts nationwide.

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and Members of the task force, thank you for your leadership and for this opportunity. The American lodging industry is fully committed to continuing to lead in the effort to stop human trafficking. I'm proud to represent an industry that confronts this difficult issue head on with resolve and compassion.

The lodging industry continues at the ready to work hand-in-hand with this task force, DHS, DOJ, local law enforcement, and NGO's to ensure these milestone events are remembered for sports-manship and national unity. As we approach the kickoff of these major events, we stand united with law enforcement, survivor support organizations, and policy makers to protect the vulnerable and demonstrate U.S. leadership in preventing human trafficking on a global stage. We are doing our part to end trafficking for good and stand at the ready to help our communities meet the moment. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. McCoy follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZA MCCOY

DECEMBER 17, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and distinguished Members of the task force. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the lodging industry's efforts to prevent human trafficking as we prepare for major events that will draw millions of visitors to the United States. My name is Eliza McCoy, and I serve as vice president of programs and impact at the American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation (AHLAF). In this role, I lead AHLA's human trafficking awareness and prevention initiatives.

Prior to joining AHLA, I served for over 15 years in law enforcement and non-profit leadership focused on child safety and anti-trafficking programs. As an investigator in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, and later leading outreach, training, and prevention efforts at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, I have seen how criminals exploit victims and the lives they shatter, and I have devoted my career to helping victims overcome their trauma. I have the privilege of working for the hotel industry where preventing human trafficking is a core value and a collective effort across the industry.

It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss how the hotel and lodging sector is proactively preventing human trafficking and collaborating with government partners, industry leaders, law enforcement, victims' rights organizations, and survivors of trafficking to secure our communities ahead of the 2026 World Cup, the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the Paralympics, and the America 250 celebrations.

AHLA AND THE AHLA FOUNDATION

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) is the unified voice of America's hotels, representing every segment of the lodging sector, from family-owned inns and franchises to iconic global brands and real estate investment trusts. The AHLA Foundation is the national charitable affiliate of AHLA, dedicated to advancing the lodging industry's role as a force for good in communities across the country. I am proud to share with you that there is no cause more universally embraced by our member companies than anti-human trafficking efforts. The AHLA Foundation is the national leader in the hotel industry's efforts against human trafficking, working to equip every property and every employee with the training, tools, and support needed to identify and prevent this heinous crime. AHLAF drives the industry's commitment to safety, security, and responsibility through its flagship No Room for Trafficking (NRFT) initiative, survivor support funding, and a wide network of public- and private-sector partnerships.

In addition to this critical prevention work, the Foundation advances the economic and social well-being of the lodging workforce through career development programs, research, education, and community investment. Guided by strong collaboration across hotel brands, ownership groups, service providers, and government agencies, the Foundation creates pathways to meaningful careers, builds safer hospitality environments, and reinforces the industry's role as a trusted partner in every community it serves.

AHLA FOUNDATION'S "NO ROOM FOR TRAFFICKING" INITIATIVE

In 2019, the AHLA Foundation, in partnership with our member companies, dedicated leaders, law enforcement partners, and expert organizations, launched the "No Room for Trafficking" (NRFT) initiative as a comprehensive, industry-wide program

to train hotel employees to identify the signs of trafficking and to report activity to the proper authorities.¹ No Room for Trafficking sends a loud and clear message: we do not tolerate trafficking in hotels.² The national program unites the entire hotel sector behind shared goals and standards. NRFT's mission is to: (1) elevate the issue of human trafficking and industry efforts to prevent it; (2) educate industry employers and employees to identify and report suspected trafficking in hotels and communities nationwide, and; (3) empower survivors with the support they need to thrive.³

Critically, AHLAF provides members with free, practical tools including: accessible training for employers and employees, model anti-trafficking policies, indicator signage, and a comprehensive Member Resource Guide detailing how to implement training, establish reporting protocols, and connect with law enforcement and victim service providers.⁴ We also formed strategic partnerships with leading anti-trafficking and child protection groups including ECPAT-USA (now PACT), Polaris, and Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) to ensure our materials reflect best practices and to coordinate our industry training with broader national efforts. Additionally, the Foundation has worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security's Blue Campaign, which has identified hospitality as a critical front-line sector for trafficking detection.⁵ Over many years, we have collaborated with DHS to promote the Blue Campaign's Hospitality Toolkit, including multilingual posters, indicator cards, and response protocols tailored for hotels, and we proudly participate in DHS's annual #WearBlueDay awareness initiative each January during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.⁶

These partnerships underscore that our industry's approach is holistic and aligned with Federal efforts: every level of our organizations, from corporate headquarters to front-desk staff, is engaged in recognizing the signs of trafficking and responding in concert with law enforcement.

TRAINING AND IMPACT

A cornerstone of No Room for Trafficking is a free, comprehensive and tailored training program available to all hotel employees, developed in collaboration with Marriott International and PACT. The flagship course, "Your Role in Preventing Human Trafficking: Recognize the Signs," can be taken on-line or delivered in-person and is designed to integrate seamlessly into hotel training systems. To maximize accessibility, it is offered in dozens of languages and formats, ensuring that employees at every property, from luxury resorts to roadside motels, can receive this critical education.

Since 2020, this training, provided at no cost to any hotel associate or interested party, has been completed more than 2.5 million times, an unprecedented scale of reach made possible by industry-wide commitment and unwavering support. Each of those completions means another set of eyes and ears on the ground, better equipped to identify potential trafficking and act swiftly.

One powerful example of the impact of employee awareness occurred at a hotel in Los Angeles. A young woman in a lobby bathroom told the hotel's staff she was being held against her will. Trained employees immediately assessed the circumstances and recalled the indicators they had learned through the No Room for Trafficking program. They acted decisively and helped a victim when she needed it most.

To ensure training translates into action, the NRFT initiative also emphasizes ongoing awareness and continuous improvement. AHLA distributes "back-of-house" signage, discreet posters for employee-only areas, that list common trafficking indi-

¹AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking (NRFT)*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/nrft/>.

²PACT, *Hotel Industry Unites on New Campaign to Fight Human Trafficking* (June 26, 2019), PACT, <https://www.wearepact.org/blog/2019/6/26/hotel-industry-unites-on-new-campaign-to-fight-human-trafficking>.

³AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking (NRFT)*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/nrft/>.

⁴PACT, *Recognize the Signs* (training course), PACT, <https://courses.wearepact.org/recognize-the-signs>.

⁵American Hotel & Lodging Association, *Human Trafficking Prevention Partners*, AHLA, <https://www.ahla.com/news/human-trafficking-prevention-partners>.

⁶AHLA Foundation, *AHLA & AHLA Foundation Honor National Human Trafficking Prevention Month; Announce Major Survivor Fund Donation*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/ahla-ahla-foundation-honor-national-human-trafficking-prevention-month-announce-major-survivor-fund-donation>.

cators and the hotline number to report suspected trafficking.⁷ Hotels display these in break rooms and housekeeping closets as daily reminders that staff are on the front lines to help save lives.

Each year, AHLAF hosts an NRFT Summit, which convenes hotel executives, security directors, operations leaders, survivors, law enforcement leaders, and experts to share best practices and emerging trends.⁸ These meetings, alongside year-round webinars and regional events, create a platform for continuous learning to enhance our industry's awareness and protocols. Our message, reinforced from the boardroom to the break room, is that every hotel employee can help in the fight against trafficking, and together we are making our hotels inhospitable to traffickers, while protecting guests, employees, and local communities.

THE NRFT SURVIVOR FUND

In addition to prevention efforts, the lodging industry also invests considerably in support for those who have survived this terrible crime. We know that identifying a victim in a hotel is only the first step; true success means that person can escape their trafficker and rebuild their life with dignity. That is why in 2022, the AHLA Foundation expanded its efforts by establishing the No Room For Trafficking Survivor Fund, an industry-wide program devoted to supporting human-trafficking survivors through leading community-based organizations nationwide.⁹ In my role at the AHLA Foundation, I have the privilege of administering this fund, which provides grants that deliver long-term support and economic empowerment for survivors. The NRFT Survivor Fund was launched with contributions from major hotel companies and has quickly grown into a multi-million-dollar resource. There is no greater moral cause for hoteliers than preventing human trafficking and supporting its victims, and I am proud of the impact we are having on the lives of these incredible people.

Since the inception of the fund, we have distributed millions of dollars in grants to various organizations which provide direct resources to help survivors move from crisis toward stability, from safe housing and child care, to counseling, job readiness, and preparation for sustainable employment. These are tangible outcomes that change lives. The grants have helped to support more than 3,200 survivors in 18 States across the country. Some of those individuals are now employed in hospitality, starting new careers in a trauma-informed environment. The Survivor Fund has created an unprecedented platform for collaboration in support of survivors. We are not only training our own employees to spot trafficking; we are investing in the long-term well-being of survivors, helping them find stability and employment, including in our sector. This holistic approach, combining prevention with survivor support, is how the lodging industry is striving to break the cycle of trafficking.

TRAFFICKING RISKS DURING MAJOR EVENTS AND INDUSTRY PREPARATION

The United States is set to host the FIFA World Cup, the Nation's sesquicentennial celebration, America 250, and the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles over the next couple of years. These events will showcase the best of America. However, as this Task Force recognizes, they also pose unique security challenges, and human trafficking is among the threats that demand our vigilance. Sporting events and mass gatherings can attract illicit business, including commercial sex trafficking.¹⁰ Traffickers are opportunistic: they seek to capitalize on the surge of travelers and the relative anonymity of crowded venues and hotels.¹¹ However, while major events often draw attention to human trafficking, focusing solely on a single day obscures the fact that this is a year-round problem. The same traffickers active during big sporting events continue their crimes long after the games end. Large events, including the World Cup and Olym-

⁷ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking Member Resource Guide*, AHLA Foundation (PDF), <https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/NRFT%20Member%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>.

⁸ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking Summit 2025*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/event/no-room-for-trafficking-summit-2025>.

⁹ American Hotel & Lodging Association, *AHLA Statement on Human Trafficking Awareness Training and Recognition Act*, AHLA, <https://www.ahla.com/news/ahla-statement-human-trafficking-awareness-training-recognition-act>.

¹⁰ Polaris, *The Super Bowl Myth* (Feb. 2016), Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2016/02/the-super-bowl-myth/>.

¹¹ *Id.*

pics, tend to spark heightened concern and law enforcement action, but trafficking is not necessarily driven by these events, it simply becomes more visible.¹²

The heightened focus on trafficking during large events must be channeled into effective, lasting solutions rather than short-term alarm. Polaris, which operated the National Human Trafficking Hotline for the past 18 years, emphasizes that portraying a single event as “the largest trafficking incident” can be misleading, the reality is that trafficking is a 365-day-a-year problem that exists in every city and every State, before, during, and after the event.¹³ Major events are a critical opportunity to strengthen our long-term anti-trafficking infrastructure. They can also leverage the intense public attention to drive sustainable improvements, better data collection on trafficking, enhanced coordination among agencies, and addressing underlying vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit.¹⁴

The hotel industry is embracing this approach. Well in advance of many major events, AHLA and our partners work to ensure heightened readiness on the ground, while integrating anti-trafficking planning into the broader security strategy. Over the past several years, AHLAF has engaged with event committees and NGO’s. We have teamed up with major brands and leading international organizations for several past Super Bowls to ensure property-level teams are trained and ready in advance of these events.¹⁵ The initiatives have brought together hoteliers, local law enforcement, and survivor advocates to raise awareness and distribute educational materials to prepare the host city.

Similarly, over the last 18 months, we have worked with State and local governments and law enforcement agencies to implement mandatory human trafficking training laws.

Currently, more than a dozen States mandate hotel employees receive human trafficking awareness training, and we are working with others to offer our collaboration, technical assistance and industry-wide networks to support the on-going planning for 2026 World Cup cities and the LA28 Olympics.

Several of our member companies are also active participants in global efforts, including serving the FIFA Human Rights Advisory Council, reinforcing the industry’s long-standing commitment to prevention and victim protection. AHLA is proudly working directly with the intergovernmental World Cup Task Force to ensure Federal stakeholders are aware of, and able to utilize, existing hotel-industry training and resources, and we remain ready to support coordinated, industry-wide collaboration with local agencies in each host city.

Hotels are also taking proactive steps to help prevent human trafficking and support victims. In addition to mandatory training for staff, our members provide emergency housing for victims, donate space for proactive law enforcement operations, and actively engage with local governments and service providers to strengthen response efforts. Many hotel companies also implement enhanced measures during high-risk periods, including refresher trainings and pre-event briefings, increased security presence, stricter guest-verification protocols, coordination with local police task forces and the FBI, and widespread dissemination of the National Human Trafficking Hotline across employee and public areas. These combined actions reflect the industry’s commitment to safeguarding guests, employees, and communities year-round, not only during marquee events.

The lodging industry is fully committed to working hand-in-hand with this Task Force, DHS, DOJ, local law enforcement, and NGO’s so that these milestone events are remembered for sportsmanship and national unity. We see the upcoming years as a crucial opportunity to demonstrate U.S. leadership in combating trafficking on a global stage.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The hospitality industry plays a front-line role in preventing and detecting human trafficking, yet several operational and structural challenges persist. Training and vigilance vary significantly across alternative lodging types, which often lack the

¹² Sebastien Malo, *Is the Super Bowl Really the U.S.’s Biggest Sex Trafficking Magnet?*, Reuters (Feb. 1, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/is-the-super-bowl-really-the-uss-biggest-sex-trafficking-magnet-idUSKBN1FL6A0/>.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Polaris, *World Cup 2026: An Opportunity to Lead on Human Trafficking* (June 2022), Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2022/06/world-cup-2026-an-opportunity-to-lead-on-human-trafficking/>.

¹⁵ AHLA Foundation, *AHLA & AHLA Foundation Honor National Human Trafficking Prevention Month; Announce Major Survivor Fund Donation*, AHLA Foundation (last visited Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/ahla-ahla-foundation-honor-national-human-trafficking-prevention-month-announce-major-survivor-fund-donation/>.

same safeguards and expectations placed on traditional hotels. Even when warning signs are identified, response pathways are not always clear, as many properties lack streamlined coordination with law enforcement and survivor-support organizations. This gap can delay responses, create confusion, and limit aid. Similarly, communities frequently lack year-round survivor support infrastructure such as safe housing and specialized investigative teams, creating vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit long after a major event ends.

To address these challenges, we recommend adopting consistent, industry-wide standards for training and anti-trafficking policies across all lodging providers, ensuring no weak links in prevention efforts. Hotels should be supported with a clear and streamlined reporting process that effectively leverages the resources of both law enforcement and survivor advocacy organizations. Finally, long-term capacity building, including investment in emergency housing and specialized law enforcement units, will strengthen community readiness throughout the year, not only during high-profile events. With these improvements in place, the lodging industry can remain a strong and reliable partner in preventing trafficking, protecting victims, and supporting prosecution of offenders before exploitation takes root.

CONCLUSION

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and Members of the task force, thank you for the opportunity to share my perspectives on human trafficking prevention with you today. The American hotel industry is fully committed to setting the national standard in the effort to stop human trafficking. I am proud to represent an industry that is confronting this difficult issue head-on with resolve and compassion. As we approach the World Cup, America 250, and the Olympics, we continue to stand united with law enforcement, survivor support organizations, and policy makers to ensure these memorable events are not exploited by those who would prey on the vulnerable. Hotels are a key part of the solution to protect our guests, our employees, and our communities. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you, Ms. McCoy.

I now recognize Ms. Lundstrom for 5 minutes, who also is a victim of human trafficking, for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MEAGAN LUNDSTROM, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, POLARIS

Ms. LUNDSTROM. Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and Members of the task force, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My testimony is grounded in my own lived experience as a survivor, data and intelligence, and what our systems teach us when we are willing to listen.

As the United States prepares to host major global events, the FIFA World Cup, the Olympic Games, and America 250, the question before us is not whether trafficking occurs because it already does. The question is whether our response reduces harm and ends cycles of abuse or if we're going to repeat past mistakes. You see, we've seen this before. After Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta, I analyzed publicly available arrest and booking data from the operations around the event. Publicly, the response was described as a success. More than 65 Federal, State, and local agencies, 169 arrests, dramatic headlines, and stories of rescue.

But the data told a different story. Half of the arrests were vulnerable and victimized women, while fewer than 10 percent were traffickers. Fourteen of the women were arrested even when indicators of victimization were present in their booking records. Victims were identified and still taken into custody, some alongside the very traffickers exploiting them. Enforcement focused heavily on individuals selling sex, while buyers and traffickers, almost entirely men, were far less likely to face serious or lasting con-

sequences, including the startling reality that one-third of the men arrested on trafficking charges were released on their own recognition within days. In other words, we knew who the victims were and who their perpetrators were, and we didn't treat them as such.

Since 2019, Georgia has only seen a total of 4 Federally-prosecuted human trafficking cases involving adult sex trafficking victims, despite the scale of enforcement activity around that single major event. Of those 4 cases, 2 were dismissed and 1 got 57 months and 1 was still pending at the time of this analysis. Of the cases that were dismissed, one of those traffickers was arrested again on new trafficking charges and at that time finally got 130 months sentenced. This teaches us an essential lesson. Arrest numbers alone are not a measure of success in anti-trafficking efforts, nor are they an efficient use of Federal or State funding and resources in and of themselves.

History only repeats itself when institutions fail to learn. The good news is, we've learned a lot. Historically, our focus at major events has been entirely on sex trafficking. That narrow lens has left a blind spot, labor trafficking. Major events require rapid, temporary workforce expansion, construction and tear down, hospitality, sanitation, transportation, security. These jobs are often filled through layers of subcontractors and labor brokers that obscure responsibility and limit oversight, creating ideal conditions for exploitation, wage theft, document confiscation, debt bondage, and threats of retaliation.

Despite this known risk, one that the International Labor Organization estimates is 5 times more prevalent than sex trafficking, the United States has no national data on labor trafficking indicators tied to major events. That gap does not reflect a lack of prevalence. It reflects a missed opportunity to identify victims and hold traffickers accountable. This is where the Department of Homeland Security can play a decisive role.

Labor trafficking is a crime of fraud and coercion. It undermines lawful labor markets and allows bad actors to profit with minimal risk. When DHS enforcement prioritizes identifying traffickers rather than defaulting to arrest-based responses toward exposure exploited workers, it improves intelligence, strengthens cases, and restores system integrity.

The lesson from Atlanta is clear. Accountability is strongest when enforcement is led by data and intelligence, and investigations are driven by outcomes rather than headlines. Anti-trafficking efforts must extend beyond the moment and concept of a rescue. Criminal records remain one of the greatest barriers to survivor stability, yet many survivors, especially of labor trafficking, are excluded from relief. At the Federal level, there is no clear mechanism to vacate convictions tied to one's trafficking.

As Congress prepares for World Cup and other global events, this is the moment to apply what we already know. Large events test our systems. They reveal whether we choose learning over repetition, accountability over optics, and justice over myth. Polaris stands ready to support Congress and Federal agencies in doing exactly that.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lundstrom follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MEGAN LUNDSTROM

DECEMBER 17, 2025

Dear Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Poe, and Members of the committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Megan Lundstrom, and I serve as the chief executive officer of Polaris, a national nonprofit dedicated to ending sex and labor trafficking and supporting victims and survivors on their journeys toward freedom. My work, and the testimony I present today, reflect the intersection of lived experience, data, and systems-level reform.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the United States prepares to host major global events, including the FIFA World Cup, the Olympics, and America 250, it is critical that Congress approaches human trafficking prevention with precision. Large events do not create trafficking, but they do amplify existing vulnerabilities, concentrate demand, and stress systems that traffickers already exploit the weaknesses of.

Historically, conversations around human trafficking at major events have focused almost exclusively on sex trafficking.¹ That narrow lens misses a substantial and predictable risk: labor trafficking, particularly in temporary, outsourced, and sub-contracted work that supports these events. A comprehensive approach that addresses both labor and sex trafficking protects families, strengthens prosecutions, and ensures Federal resources achieve their intended impact on this crime.²

II. LABOR TRAFFICKING AT MAJOR EVENTS: A PERSISTENT AND UNDEREXAMINED HARM

Labor trafficking remains the most under-identified and under-enforced form of human trafficking in the United States, including in the context of major events.³ The International Labor Organization estimates that there are 24.9 million people globally experiencing forced labor, and that there are 5 victims of labor trafficking for every 1 victim of sex trafficking.⁴ Large-scale events require a rapid and temporary expansion of the workforce in industries that are consistently identified through enforcement actions and research as higher risk for labor trafficking, including venue construction and teardown; hospitality, food service, and concessions; janitorial, sanitation, and waste services; groundskeeping, landscaping, and security; and transportation and logistics. These positions are frequently filled through multiple layers of subcontractors, labor brokers, and staffing agencies—arrangements that obscure lines of responsibility and enforcement and create conditions in which coercion, wage theft, document confiscation, debt bondage, and threats of retaliation can occur in environments where oversight is fragmented or unclear.

Labor trafficking is a crime of exploitation and fraud.⁵ Traffickers deliberately target workers with limited job mobility because it allows them to operate with low risk and high profits. The Department of Homeland Security plays a critical role in disrupting these schemes by ensuring that enforcement efforts identify and pursue traffickers who abuse labor systems, commit fraud, and profit from coercion. When labor trafficking indicators are recognized and acted upon during enforcement activities, DHS strengthens worker protections, restores the integrity of labor markets, and ensures that bad actors—rather than exploited workers—are held accountable.

III. WHAT THE DATA FROM PAST MAJOR EVENTS SHOWS

Despite well-documented risks, there is currently no comprehensive national dataset tracking labor trafficking indicators tied to major events. This absence of data does not reflect the absence of harm—it reflects a missed opportunity. Large-scale events bring together regulated industries, complex contracting chains, and

¹Gilmer, D. (2025). *Trafficking and Large-Scale Events*. Routledge Handbook of Sport Security, 166.

²Alliance to End Slavery & Trafficking. “Presidential Priorities for Ending Forced Labor, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, 2025–2029.” <https://endslaveryandtrafficking.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2025-29-Anti-trafficking-Transition-Recommendations-to-Trump-Administration-FINAL.pdf>.

³Polaris. “Recognizing Labor Trafficking.” December 16, 2025. <https://polarisproject.org/labor-trafficking/>.

⁴International Labor Office. “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage.” 2017. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf.

⁵Polaris. “Recognizing Labor Trafficking.” December 16, 2025. <https://polarisproject.org/labor-trafficking/>.

temporary work forces, creating a rare window to gather actionable intelligence, identify patterns of exploitation, and strengthen prevention strategies. The progress made in understanding sex trafficking around major events provides a strong foundation; those same analytical, interagency, and survivor-informed approaches can and should be extended to labor trafficking as the next frontier of event-related trafficking prevention.

The data from past major events make clear that this is not uncharted territory. Extensive documentation from Super Bowl host cities demonstrates both what works and what does not. Multi-year case studies from the 2015 and 2016 Super Bowls show that proactive, interagency, and multidisciplinary planning is most effective when it begins early, centers survivor input, and coordinates law enforcement with service providers and community organizations.⁶ These approaches were associated with reduced crime displacement, improved victim identification, and increased access to non-punitive services.

At the same time, my 2019 analysis of Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta highlights a critical caution: increased police activity results in more arrests, but not necessarily improved identification of trafficking or accountability for traffickers.⁷ In Atlanta, adult women were arrested even when clear indicators of victimization were present; survivors were charged alongside their traffickers; and enforcement actions disproportionately focused on individuals selling sex, while buyers and traffickers—all of them males—were far less likely to face serious or lasting consequences. Public narratives in the media framed these outcomes as “rescues,” yet the data reflected continued criminalization of victims.

This distinction is essential. Arrest numbers alone are not a proxy for success, and absent survivor-centered, trauma-informed safeguards, expanded enforcement risks replicating these harms at a much larger scale during events such as the upcoming World Cup.

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY, NOT CRIMINALIZATION

An effective anti-trafficking strategy at major events must be grounded in a clear principle: non-punishment.⁸ Traffickers should be held accountable, and individuals experiencing exploitation should not be criminalized.⁹ This requires avoiding default arrest-based responses toward individuals in commercial sex and workers in industries where labor trafficking indicators are present; embedding victim advocates directly into operational planning and on-the-ground responses; ensuring non-punitive access to local, low-barrier services, including drop-in centers; and training patrol officers—not only specialized units—to recognize indicators of human trafficking. Survivor-centered, trauma-informed care is critical and should be prioritized in any law enforcement activities.^{10 11 12}

Criminal records remain among the most significant barriers to survivor stability and long-term recovery.¹³ While some States permit vacatur or expungement for survivors of sex trafficking, many exclude survivors of labor trafficking despite the presence of identical coercive conditions.¹⁴ At the Federal level, there is currently no mechanism for criminal record relief for trafficking survivors convicted of Federal offenses, outside of a Presidential pardon. This gap undermines survivor cooperation with law enforcement, impedes recovery, and weakens the pursuit of justice. Congress should advance statutory relief that applies to both labor and sex trafficking

⁶Shared Hope International. “Promising Practices in Combatting Juvenile Sex Trafficking Surrounding Large Events and Beyond.” 2016. https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SHI_Case_Study_Super_Bowl_Outcome.pdf.

⁷Megan Lundstrom. “An Analysis of the 2019 Super Bowl.” February, 2019.

⁸US Department of State. “2025 Trafficking in Persons Report.” <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

⁹Human Rights Watch. “US: ICE Arrest at FIFA Event Spotlights Dangers for World Cup.” December 16, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/03/us-ice-arrest-at-fifa-event-spotlights-dangers-for-world-cup>.

¹⁰Institute on Assets and Social Policy. “Trauma-Informed Care for Survivors of Human Trafficking: A State of the Field in 2019.” <https://heller.brandeis.edu/iere/pdfs/racial-wealth-equity/immigrant-integration/trauma-informed-care-for-survivors-of-human-trafficking-a-state-of-the-field-in-2019.pdf>.

¹¹US Department of Justice. “Trauma-Informed Care for Survivors of Human Trafficking: A State of the Field in 2019.” <https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/trauma-informed-care-survivors-human-trafficking-state-field-2019>.

¹²Center for Health Care Strategies. “State and Federal Support of Trauma-Informed Care: Sustaining the Momentum.” September 27, 2017. <https://www.chcs.org/state-federal-support-trauma-informed-care-sustaining-momentum/>.

¹³Polaris. “Criminal Record Relief for Trafficking Survivors.” 2023. <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Criminal-Record-Relief-for-Trafficking-Survivors-by-Polaris.pdf>.

¹⁴Id. at 32.

survivors, covers Federal convictions, and recognizes crimes committed as a direct result of trafficking. Absent such reforms, survivors continue to face life-long penalties for crimes they were forced to commit by their traffickers.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

As the United States prepares to host the World Cup and other major international events, we urge Congress to take the following actions:

1. *Broaden the Federal focus beyond sex trafficking.*—Ensure the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and partner agencies explicitly plan for labor trafficking risks across event-related industries.
2. *Integrate labor rights outreach into event planning.*—DHS can partner with local and national workers' rights organizations to educate workers about their rights, how to report abuse, and ensure that seeking assistance will not result in arrest or deportation.
3. *Strengthen oversight of event-related imports.*—Fully utilize existing authorities, including Withhold Release Orders and the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, to prevent goods produced with forced labor, from souvenirs to uniforms, from entering U.S. markets.^{15 16}
4. *Require victim-centered enforcement metrics.*—Measure success by traffickers prosecuted and victims out of harm's way, rather than by raw arrest totals alone.
5. *Reauthorize and strengthen the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).*—For 25 years, the TVPA has been the backbone of U.S. anti-trafficking efforts, funding survivor services, law enforcement training, and prevention programs at the Federal, State, and local levels. Reauthorization ensures sustained support for victims while reinforcing bipartisan leadership to combat human trafficking.

VI. CONCLUSION

Large events test our systems. They reveal whether we respond with coordination or chaos, with data or myth, with justice or optics. If we plan early, center survivors, and focus on accountability rather than criminalization, the World Cup can demonstrate not just global athletic leadership but global moral leadership.

Polaris stands ready to support Congress, Federal agencies, and other partners in identifying and implementing best practices in the anti-trafficking field. This includes promoting approaches that are survivor-centered, informed by data from past events, attentive to both labor and sex trafficking, and designed to prevent harm caused by outdated or punitive interventions.

By learning from prior events, centering survivor expertise, and prioritizing prevention and accountability, we can ensure that major events are managed in ways that protect human rights, expand access to justice, and advance the effectiveness of U.S. anti-trafficking efforts.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Lundstrom.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions.

You know, when I authorized the Blue Campaign into law, it was designed to work with law enforcement, to partner with them, but also industry stakeholders like the Hotel-Motel Association that was being, you know, exploited itself by these traffickers to really help combat the scourge of human trafficking.

Ms. McCoy, can you give us an update on your, say, your relationship with the Blue Campaign and how well is it working today?

Ms. McCoy. Thank you. Yes, I'm happy to. We are strong partners with the DHS Blue Campaign. We meet regularly to align our tactics and strategies and training and community outreach and awareness raising. We certainly think they continue to benefit our

¹⁵ US Department of Labor. "Information and Resources on Withhold Release Orders (WROs)." <https://www.dol.gov/index.php/agencies/ilab/comply-chain/steps-to-a-social-compliance-system/step-6-remediate-violations/keytopic-information-and-resources-on-withhold-release-orders-wros>.

¹⁶ US Department of State. "Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) Fact Sheet." January 20, 2025. <https://www.state.gov/office-to-monitor-and-combat-trafficking-in-persons/releases/2025/01/uyghur-forced-labor-prevention-act/flpa-fact-sheet>.

on-going support, particularly as they are making great strides in integrating survivor perspective and lived experience and the work that they do. We are happy to stand alongside them in those efforts.

Mr. McCAUL. That is excellent. I would like to talk about over the last 4 to 5 years, we have had almost 500,000 unaccompanied children that came into this country, primarily at the hands of drug cartels, sex traffickers. It was one of the largest human trafficking events in the United States, really, of our lifetime. Of those 500,000 children, more than 90,000 were sent to sponsors or who were unvetted, essentially unvetted sponsors, or to homes where no home study was conducted. In other words, you know, and I saw this, where 10 children would go to 1 house as a sponsor of the 10 children. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know what is going on here. It was a perfect storm for child sex trafficking. Now, unfortunately, it is occurring.

Mr. Thompson, I think in your role you're best equipped to give us sort-of a prognosis of this problem. How do you see their vulnerability going into these FIFA World Cup games and the Olympics, you know, as well? How can we protect them?

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Chairman, you've taped, you've bookended the situation very well. We believe it is about 400,000. We don't know, let's be honest. The records that were developed and used, from all indications and all reports and briefings I've received from the Government are deeply disturbing. Our inability to find and assure this Congress and the Nation's public that these individuals are not IA, dead, are being trafficked in one way, shape, or form, including sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and others. Third thing that is deeply, deeply troubling is that the scale of this, if you did simple math, assuming the 400,000 number is accurate, divided simply by the number of counties in this country, 3,087 or 88, and you come up with a pretty damning number.

What I can tell you that we are looking at with the administration is how do we get our arms around the data, No. 1? That's a challenge for them. No. 2, then what do you do with the data from a targeting package perspective? Where does it go and how is it followed up upon? Those two steps alone are incredibly labor and financially incentive, they're costly, takes time.

I wish I could tell you that the prospect is bright. I think there are some incredibly talented people at DHS. I think there are some incredibly talented people at our State law enforcement agencies and our local agencies that are working this. But the numbers are staggering. Absolutely staggering.

Mr. McCAUL. They are staggering. I want to work with you to make sure we get the data to law enforcement. We know we have documented these unaccompanied children.

Mr. THOMPSON. We have.

Mr. McCAUL. We know where they went. We don't know where they are, some of them today. But we do know that they are ripe for being, you know, exploited for trafficking purposes. It is our obligation to protect them from these traffickers. So I look forward to working with you and law enforcement on this.

Last, Ms. Litvak, you know, you worked—your organization worked with the same stadium that hosted the Super Bowl back

in 2017, into a No Trafficking Zone. Houston is going to host the FIFA World Cup next year. Can you tell us a little bit about not only your organization, but how these trafficking organizations operate? I know that 750 individuals were indicted and prosecuted after that Super Bowl game. Can you tell us about how these organizations, these criminal enterprises, work from the lowest level with the pimp and the groomer to the highest-level executive?

Ms. LITVAK. Absolutely. Thank you, Chairman McCaul.

So I'm so blessed to work alongside the No Trafficking Zone because they're truly—we are truly a survivor-led and trauma-informed organization. That's something that NRG Park has taken very seriously, is becoming the world's first certified No Trafficking Zone. Working with their General Manager Hussein and all of our incredible impact partners there. Primarily, really trauma-informed law enforcement is so important because uninformed and, quite frankly, corrupt players in the anti-trafficking space even or those who pose as doing good work, but they're really a part of the problem, we want to ensure we are encouraging those who are doing the work for the right reasons to continue to collaborate together, especially because traffickers are watching our efforts and they're calculated.

My traffickers specifically would study the laws, primarily when I was first targeted at my own high school as a minor. As a junior in high school, my traffickers waited because they knew the law in Texas that once you turn 18, there's a lot less that law enforcement can do to intervene. This is an issue that in Harris County alone being one of the largest counties in the whole country, there's an average of over 200 runaway minors daily. Law enforcement are already so understaffed and overworked and underpaid. But once we understand the themes, the patterns, we study those patterns by bringing survivor leaders to the forefront.

So my lived experience in NRG Park and in the surrounding hotels and motels, I was trafficked to during the 2017 Super Bowl in February, where the New England Patriots and the Atlanta Falcons came to our city. But where did I meet these illicit sex buyers? So on the lower levels here, beginning in street and gang trafficking, what is one of the No. 1 markets that is targeted to procure and to exploit already vulnerable individuals? It's actually hidden in plain sight site. It's our sexually-oriented businesses, specifically strip clubs.

Houston is actually the strip club capital of the country, which many people may mistake States such as Nevada and California for. But when we work with our task force, and that's why I think it's so important to have a structure such as a task force to combat this issue because these organized criminals work in networks. They are educated, they know the laws, they are experts at evading detection, but they're hidden in plain sight.

Club owners and strip club general managers operate just the same as sex traffickers and human traffickers. So when you get to the more sophisticated levels of organized crime, not only do you have MS-13 cartel, all these horrible groups that are very prevalent in Texas, especially being a border State. We have to be able to fill these gaps, but how do we address those? We talk with survivors, just like those who are on this panel right now, to hear

what would have made a difference when we were being trafficked? But then to understand these aren't always just street-level criminals. They are what's known as corporate CEO traffickers.

I was trafficked by both men and women. I was sold to both men and women. But these traffickers can be lawyers, as were some of mine, and they're businessmen, businesswomen, who are well-spoken. Sadly, a lot of women are aiding these criminal networks. No. 1, sometimes we know that people can go from being victimized to being forced to be bottoms, which is people who do recruiting for human traffickers. But there's so many other organized crime networks and criminal enterprises taking place, such as drug trafficking. But when you have Corporate America involved, my traffickers were laundering the money that we were making from the strip clubs with Corporate America businesses.

This is something that we have to find more ways to track this crime because data and mass underreporting is such a huge issue, but especially when victims like myself are under immense threat and pressure by those who will use violence. But force, fraud, and coercion are so important for us to tackle at all levels.

Mr. MCCAUL. I think, you know, as we talked about the victims being the criminals, in this case we shouldn't just go after the lowest level in these organizations. We need to go up to the very top, high-level—

Ms. LITVAK. Start at the top.

Mr. MCCAUL [continuing]. And that is a shame. I know that the FBI is working on several sting operations that we can't discuss today. I wish them, you know, the best.

I know when Back Page was taken down by Congress and you were held captive, that had an immense impact on the traffickers. As you told me, they were very, very upset about that, which is good news.

With that, I apologize, I went way over my time, but I guess that is prerogative, you know. I recognize our Ranking Member, Ms. Pou.

Ms. POU. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No problem with me.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you.

Ms. POU. Thank you so very much, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, let me just say to Ms. Lundstrom and Ms. Litvak, thank you. Thank you so very much for joining us today and for sharing your very, very important work. But also, it takes an immense courage and empowerment to share your personal experiences and the obstacles that you have overcome. So thank you for sharing that. Really appreciate your testimony and the words and the kind of work that you are all doing now to make sure to address that.

We have talked about this, right? It has been mentioned all of the upcoming events, like the World Cup, the Summer Olympics, the America 250 will require significant labor to build the infrastructure needed to host mass matches and related festivals.

In the past, we have seen labor trafficking among vulnerable individuals who perform temporary labor-intensive jobs such as venue construction, janitorial services, groundkeeping, just to name a few. These operations are often outsourced to contract labor crews and individuals who can be susceptible to force labor activi-

ties. So we cannot take our eyes off the enhanced risk of forced labor trafficking at these events.

Ms. Lundstrom, what should, in your opinion, what should Congress be aware of when it comes to forced labor and labor trafficking violations and how can we address the significant threat at mass gathering events?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. Thank you, Ranking Member Pou. I'm happy to answer that question briefly.

I think there's two elements that are really important to be considering here. The first of which is, as I mentioned, there is no data around labor trafficking at events. So if we are going to move forward with a strategy, we need to know what it actually looks like. We need to have a picture first. So I think prioritizing data and really understanding how major events impact and change local workforces is the first step there.

Then the second piece is really thinking about those supply chains and the products that are being purchased and brought in as well, and making sure that those products are not coming into our country and not being sold for additional profits that have been made in other countries by exploited persons.

Ms. POU. Right. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for that, for your thoughtful response to that.

You know, it is vital that the Department of Homeland Security and the Blue Campaign also focus on laborers and work to ensure that they know their rights as well. So I think that is important. I hope that my colleagues will certainly join me in advocating for DHS to incorporate this issue in the Blue Campaign.

I also wanted to ask you, you know, I think transportation is so very key to a lot of what we are talking about here. As the most densely-populated State in the entire country, New Jersey relies on its roads, bridges, and rails more than anyone else. During the World Cup, New Jersey will host 8 matches including the final, as I mentioned earlier. Over 1.2 million fans are expected to travel to our State to enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime event. In my district specifically, the Secaucus Junction connects numerous New Jersey transit rail lines and serves as an essential hub for fans traveling to MetLife Stadium to watch the matches.

We know, we know that criminals rely on transportation hub to traffic victims. I have been encouraged by efforts from the Federal, State, local, and nonprofit stakeholders to increase awareness of how to recognize and stop human trafficking in and around places like the Secaucus Junction.

Ms. Lundstrom, if you would also just share with us, how do criminals use a transit hub, like the Secaucus Junction, to exploit victims? How can we educate the public on how to recognize and report human trafficking in these settings?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. Happy to answer that question as well. Transportation is just one of the many means that traffickers use to bring victims to the place where they are sold, ultimately for that trafficker's profits. That happens across all modes of transportation. So, again, there is this element of education for the general public to understand what trafficking looks like because it touches all of our lives every single day. So being aware of it and knowing where to go to reach out to report instances and also where to pro-

vide resources to victims I think is very important when it comes to anti-trafficking work.

I know New Jersey has the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking and they're doing wonderful work. I have a close friend and colleague who is a survivor leader there, Gina Cavallo. I think New Jersey has set a wonderful example of what survivor-led anti-trafficking initiatives can really look like thanks in large part to both you and the coalition.

Ms. POU. Thank you. Thank you so very much. We certainly have worked really hard in New Jersey to try to make this a point of, you know, something that we absolutely have focused on and have allowed for very, very important legislation to be passed and supported and signed into law. So I am happy to have been a part of that during my tenure in the legislature.

A real quick question for Ms. McCoy. I was listening to your testimony and learned, or as I was listening to what you were saying, you were talking about the important elements that you provide for the members of everyone who is surrounded, connected, and employed through the facilities, the hotel and motel enterprises. Part of my legislation that I spoke about earlier in New Jersey certainly and talked about the training and identification, right, and we want to make sure that we are identifying these individuals as victims and not someone who is looking to procure these types of services and be arrested and thrown into jail. The fact that some of them have not only been identified as anything other—you know, something other than a victim, but been put in the very same vehicle, just transporting them into the Police Department with their perpetrator, as you have mentioned earlier, Ms. Lundstrom.

But back to Ms. McCoy. If you would, please, one of the things that was truly important to me was making sure that we provided and almost required that training be provided to each and every one of those employees so that they could easily and clearly identify and make a distinction who were really being victimized, right, and exploited and becoming that victim, and who may very well be doing a different—you know, doing it for different? Can you share with us a little bit, be more specific with respect to the type of training that you are talking about to easily identify? How do you do that for your employees? I am talking about housekeepers, I am talking about door elevator operators, all kinds, from, you know, the cook right on through the super manager overseeing the facility. Thank you.

Ms. MCCOY. Thank you for the question. Yes, we are anti-human trafficking training that we support, again, free for any industry employee, but also anyone in our communities that would like to take it, does focus on all forms of human trafficking and provides a number of indicators that in some combination may indicate suspected human trafficking and directs employees exactly how to report that information, both to their supervisors on property, as well as the National Human Trafficking Hotline and law enforcement, where appropriate.

So that training is designed to specifically showcase ways in which hotels can potentially provide opportunities for that exploitation and how we can mitigate that risk, both from, like you said, any role, front desk all the way to our culinary and our cooks.

We've seen such a tremendous amount of engagement across our industry by all different types of employees who not only are taking that education and turning it into action by making those reports while at work, but also in their communities. Because ultimately, our job as an industry is to be a community steward. We're creating more eyes and ears, whether it's reporting while at work or in the communities where we all live and reside.

Ms. POU. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. MCCAUL. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Strong.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Chairman McCaul, and thank you to the witnesses for being with us today, and to Chairman McCaul and Ranking Member Pou for making this hearing happen. Thank you both.

As the United States prepares for several major international events, understanding the trafficking risk associated with mass gathering is increasingly important. There are not many issues that bring both sides of the aisle together. This could be the one. You think about this morning, I was in a hearing related to unmanned aerial vehicles, drones, around mass gathering events. We need to defeat both of these issues, trafficking and drones at the same level.

Mr. Thompson, it is great to be with you again. From your perspective, how do you mass gathering events like the World Cup strain law enforcement capacity to address human trafficking?

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Strong. It's always a pleasure to be here with you as well.

There's an enormous strain on local law enforcement today, as you know as well as I do. We are overtaxed and undermanned in many, many agencies across this country. That's just a fact. The ability to recruit and retain people has been difficult on a good day, to put it mildly. The past 5 years, we've seen some really, really tough times. People, that's No. 1.

Second challenge is that technology is moving so fast that the criminal element, sadly, is more sophisticated than the most sophisticated Wall Street banks. These are really sharp, very motivated individuals and organizations. They have the best of the best to circumvent being caught, circumvent the investigations, and circumvent the communication systems. They're doing it as we speak.

Mr. STRONG. Absolutely. As those pressures increase, how effective are current information-sharing mechanisms, such as coordination between Federal, State, and local partners, and the use of fusion centers in identifying trafficking activities tied to major events?

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Strong, this is a soft subject for me. I've been in this job for 11 years and this has been a No. 2 priority for me is the information intelligence sharing, criminal intelligence sharing, from the Federal Government down to the local level, to the boots on the ground. It's long overdue. I think, I think, the National Counterterrorism Center and the ODNI have finally cracked a code. If we can't put that information onto a device in the hands of a law enforcement—sworn law enforcement officer, what to look for, what to be concerned about, and take the see something, say

something up to the highest possible level, then we are totally missing the boat. But I think, I think, they're about to do that.

I believe that there's two programs we are working with the intelligence community and DHS on to try and get this finally fixed so that we can streamline getting that information from the President of the United States down to the boots on the ground. It's that—it's possible, it's doable. It's not a technological problem. It's a will. It's a will.

Mr. STRONG. I will tell you, we got to break these fiefdoms down so that we can get this information. The information gathering, I know we have got talked about it and I know your desire.

The National Child Advocacy Center was started in my hometown of Huntsville, Alabama, and is now all over the country, and I see how that works: local law enforcement, State, Federal, DAs, all in one facility. It makes a difference and we have got to continue that fight.

Ms. McCoy, hotels are often on the front lines of trafficking detection. How prepared is the hospitality industry for the coming influx of visitors as the U.S. hosts major international events?

Ms. MCCOY. We certainly know that human trafficking is an insidious crime across the Nation in a variety of different communities and locations. For us in the hotel industry, we have had a long-standing commitment to being at the ready from a training perspective and operational perspective. Certainly when we have large events, such as the ones we've talked about today, we take the opportunity to amplify those efforts to reinforce them. But it certainly is something that has become an automatic component to every employee's experience in our industry and something that we just continue to double down on when we have the attention and the awareness from these major events.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

Looking beyond preparedness efforts, Ms. Vafa, how do traffickers exploit the high travel volumes during major sporting events?

Ms. VAFA. Well, they use these trafficking routes. I mean, the traditional routes that were used for the drug trades have been repurposed, of course.

But, again, I'd like to emphasize from my testimony, trafficking is a market crime. While it's very important to focus on traffickers and trafficker enforcement and prosecutions are essential, traffickers are merely responding to the demand that is created by sex buyers. So buyer deterrence addresses economic incentives upstream. So, you know, we have Federal laws, we have State laws that mandate buyer deterrence and buyer enforcement. That's just not being done.

At the Federal level to scale, it's being discouraged through TVPA grant programs, through the enhanced collaborative model we're literally getting language from OVC discouraging these types of, you know, proactive deterrence mechanisms, even though we know they work, we have evidence from jurisdictions that they work. We're just spinning our wheels if we're just going after traffickers until we actually focus on the true drivers of the harm when we know they inflict just as much if not more egregious forms of violence on victims all over place the country.

So, yes, it's very important to look at these patterns and detect and respond to the trafficker and exploiters patterns, but it's also very important to be observing buyer behavior through on-line sex ads. We have evidence. We were just speaking to partners this morning about the PGA Tour. They've been tracking it for several years, looking at baseline on-line sex ads. They see a surge every time the PGA Tour or comes to town. You can see this with many other big events and large-scale events that come to host cities.

So again, I just want to emphasize the importance of not just looking at traffickers, but also sex buyers when it comes to sex trafficking.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. I am going to tell you, Ms. Litvak and Ms. Lundstrom, two of the most powerful testimonies I have ever heard. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. MCCAUL. I thank the gentleman.

Let me, if I could just echo, I tell you what, we go after a couple of high-profile buyers, they are going to pucker up and so is the entire marketplace. It will have a very strong impact on, you know, who is going to be involved in trying to buy humans.

Now, with that, the Chairman recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Correa.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to thank all witnesses for being here today, especially the victims that have had guts.

Mr. MCCAUL. I am sorry. Go ahead. Would you like me to—the mic falls, but—

Mrs. MCIVER. Go ahead, Louis.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mrs. McIver.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you. I am sorry about that, Lou.

Thank you to our co-chairs for spearheading this hearing today. Truly delighted to be here to hear from our witnesses. I want to thank each of you for being here today and for having the humility and vulnerability to testify. Thank you so much.

As a mother, a daughter, and a sister, this issue is deeply personal to me. The fear of a loved one going missing and being exploited is unimaginable. It is our responsibility to ensure authorities have the tools they need to prevent trafficking and protect victims, especially during large-scale events. Human trafficking, as been mentioned multiple times on this dais today, is a horrific crime that affects all of our communities. It is particularly horrific because the victims are often among the most vulnerable people in society: minorities, immigrants, children, and people of color.

I want to talk a little bit about the impact of human trafficking for Black Americans. Black women and girls are among the most vulnerable populations in the United States. In fact, while only around 12 percent of the U.S. population is Black, the victims and survivors of sex trafficking are 40 percent Black. These numbers are raise important questions about the victimization and the criminalization of Black women and girls.

Ms. Vafa, I want to go to you because I know you have written about this issue. Could you walk us through some of the reasons Black girls in particular are being victimized, trafficked, and re-victimized through the criminal justice system?

Ms. VAFA. Yes, thank you so much for that question. Rights4Girls has written extensively about the this topic. We offer numerous trainings on this topic as well.

We have to understand the sex trade in the United States today as a legacy of this Nation's long-standing history of racialized and gendered violence. It stems directly from colonization and the transatlantic slave trade. Understanding it as part of that long-standing history where, you know, sex trafficking was one of the first things that happened as a result of colonization and the trafficking and enslavement of Indigenous women and girls, followed closely by the trafficking that happened as a result of transatlantic slavery. For example, the fancy girl trade, which is one of the earliest documented instances of sex trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of Black women and even young men who were sold explicitly for sexual exploitation in this country, we have to understand that much of the conditions that we see today in the sex trade are an extension of that history. That generations, hundreds of years of normalizing the commodification of Black and Brown predominantly female bodies for male profit and pleasure have really created the conditions that we see today.

So we have many of these fact sheets on our websites and in our report. Basically, any jurisdiction that you look at across the country today, we see a glaring over-representation of predominantly Black and Indigenous women and girls. But to use one example, we can submit this further for the record, King County, which is the area around Seattle, Washington, we know that Black people are 7 percent of the population, but they represent 44 percent of child trafficking victims. In that same jurisdiction where white people are 66 percent of the population, sex buyers are 73 percent white men.

Mrs. MCIVER. Wow.

Ms. VAFA. So just to give you a sense of that disproportionality, we've also collected this data to disaggregate these types of disparities across the country. What really adds to this injustice is that, to your point, Black women and girls are overrepresented amongst those who are criminalized for their exploitation. We call this the sexual abuse to prison pipeline. In our work and advocacy, trafficking is one manifestation of this abuse to prison pipeline. Black girls in particular are affected through different forms of intersectional biases, predominantly what's known as adultification bias. This is a documented form of implicit bias. The Georgetown Law Center on Gender Justice and Opportunity has documented this in a report called "Girlhood Interrupted."

But it's been shown that young Black girls receive many of the same stereotypes that are often attributed to Black women, again stemming from colonization and slavery around them being seemed as promiscuous, seductive, angry, defiant. They're projected onto Black girls. As a result, through this research that Georgetown conducted, Black girls are seen as less innocent and much older than their white peers. When they experience sexual abuse and sex trafficking, they're seen as less traumatized by that abuse and, in fact, complicit in that abuse. So subsequent research has shown that they're more likely to be deemed as offenders than victims of

crime. So there's research to support this, but that is a very quick overview of that trajectory.

Mrs. McIVER. Yeah. No, thank you so much. I heard, like, inhale, exhale up here while you were delivering some of that data. Truly thankful for your expertise and you sharing that research and that data with many of us here.

I want to thank each of you once again for being here and for sharing your testimony. With that, I am going to be respectful to the 5-minute time and I am going to yield back.

Mr. McCAUL. No, thank you. Thank you for calling attention to that racial disparity. I was not aware of that as well.

The Chairman now recognizes Mr. Crane from Arizona.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I want to say thank you to the panel for coming today. Obviously a very heavy subject. I especially want to thank the victims here today for coming and testifying about what we can do to help stop sex trafficking, especially around major sporting events in the United States.

Border Czar Tom Homan recently announced that more than 62,000 migrant children have been rescued by the Trump administration and saved from truly despicable conditions, including sex trafficking, forced labor after they crossed the border without parents under the Biden administration. According to a 2024 DHS OIG report, the Biden administration released 291,000 unaccompanied alien children without notices to appear or a scheduled court date and had no way of tracking them after they arrived in the country. What makes this even more troubling is that just yesterday, over 200 House Democrats voted against the Kayla Hamilton Act, legislation that includes provision that strengthened protections for unaccompanied alien children by requiring thorough background checks of potential sponsors and adult household members and imposing stricter criminal history requirements.

Sheriff, do you think that these families that we are putting these unaccompanied minors into, do you think that those families should be vetted?

Mr. THOMPSON. Absolutely.

Mr. CRANE. You think they should be thoroughly vetted?

Mr. THOMPSON. Absolutely, top to bottom.

Mr. CRANE. Can you see any reason why people in this very chamber would be voting against that?

Mr. THOMPSON. I can't think of a reason.

Mr. CRANE. Thanks, Sheriff.

Ms. Vafa, you mentioned several major sporting events where many traffickers and predators were arrested, and I appreciate you bringing up that data. I am guessing most of these arrests were likely due to digital on-line investigations. Can you confirm or deny that?

Ms. VAFA. I would have to go back and check, but I assume many of these were based on on-line stings and some joint cooperative between local and likely Federal law enforcement.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you.

Ms. Litvak, thank you so much for that amazing testimony. When I get to hear individuals like yourself who have taken something that is just awful and atrocious and turn it into something amazing and beautiful, it is one of the most powerful testimonies

I have ever heard. I also appreciate that you brought up one of my favorite scripture verses as well, Genesis 50:20. I think that is so awesome. I have never met you in my life, but I am proud of you for doing what you are doing.

What would you like to tell young boys and girls and parents that might listen to this hearing about how to avoid the awful victimization that you endured?

Ms. LITVAK. Thank you so much for sharing that, but also acknowledging, you know, this is also a spiritual battle as much as it is physical.

Mr. CRANE. Amen.

Ms. LITVAK. It's pure evil. But what I want people to know, don't think families, parents, that this can't happen to and this can't happen because it happens in our own backyard. No Trafficking Zone understands this happens in every single school district. This happened to me in Katy ISD. There's wonderful teachers there, some of my best friends work there, but also there's a lot of complacency. So not always are people's intentions malicious.

But parents and families need to be on the lookout for vulnerable children, and Jeffrey Epstein and the Ghislaine Maxwell case is a great example of this, who were recruiting and paying other children who were impoverished and who were marginalized in different communities, that were more susceptible to being given whether it was a couple hundred dollars or an incentive for peer-on-peer recruitment. So this—anybody can be a victim, anybody can be a trafficker and anybody can be a buyer as well, but also procure a forced labor. This can happen to any child.

I never want somebody to have to walk through what myself and my family have walked through and countless other victims, so many who will never get to have their voices heard, and they have a voice, but many people sadly do not make it out. It's 1 percent. Don't wait until this happens to you, where it's—it should become personal before this happens to you, where everybody takes up arms and covers our communities, our churches, our schools, our institution, our government in prayer constantly. But we're in such a divisive time and we really need more unity, but also education and awareness. Be prepared before it happens to you.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you.

Ms. LITVAK. Thank you.

Mr. CRANE. My last question. Ms. Lundstrom, you discussed many failures in our legal system to hold traffickers accountable. You went through several examples of, you know, arrests, and then people not being—traffickers not being held accountable. In your opinion, ma'am, what is the disconnect with our justice system? Why do you think more of these individuals aren't actually being incarcerated and held accountable?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. That's a great question, and I wish that there was a single answer. I think there are many different systems failures along the way. The reality is, because we don't have comprehensive data and because we don't share information across information silos, we're not truly able to see a full picture of where those gaps are and how best to address them. That's actually something that Polaris is working on right now, is a national framework that would help identify risk patterns across industries, coordinate

law enforcement and service providers, and deploy resources to where they're needed. But ultimately, it starts with having that data and intelligence and being able to talk about it and look at the different pieces of this story.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. MCCAUL. If I could just add, you know, Ms. Litvak came from a very wealthy suburb of Houston that was in my district at that time. You wouldn't think this would happen in a place like that, but no neighborhood is protected from this. That is why we introduced the Stop Human Trafficking in School Zones Act to increase the penalties to 5 years in prison, just like we have, you know, the same policy for guns in school zones. Why in the world wouldn't be able to pass that kind of legislation that has a harsh penalty for human traffickers found in school zones?

Mr. Thompson.

Mr. THOMPSON. Pass it. Pass it today, not next week. Pass it right now.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thanks for the endorsement.

The gentleman now from California is recognized again, Mr. Correa.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, especially the victims, for speaking up.

I am from Orange County, California, probably one of the wealthiest counties in California, in the United States. Last I looked, more than 50 percent of the young girls in juvenile hall were there because of prostitution. I am hearing you say this is a demand business. I also hear you say one-third of men arrested were released within days of being arrested. Is that correct? I am hearing that maybe the laws are there or are they not? Do we need stronger laws to shame these individuals so that their community knows that they are actually having sex with underage children? Is that what we need to do? Please.

Ms. VAFA. Well, I'm not sure if you followed what happened in California, but it was actually very difficult to get felony accountability for buyers of child sex. So this was a huge battle in California. We ended up finally coming to a compromise where, you know, there was a 3-year differential, but this was very difficult. In our buyers on mass—

Mr. CORREA. You wonder, you have to come to a compromise—

Ms. VAFA. Yeah.

Mr. CORREA [continuing]. To move ahead with prosecuting these individuals. Sex crimes are the most underreported crimes there are in society today. I hear some of you saying we need to wait for data. I don't think we need to wait for data. We know what the hell is going on. OK? Sex slavery. We need to do everything in our disposal to stop this.

We are 6 months away from the FIFA World Cup events here in the United States and to think that we are heading in this direction. Do we need to activate volunteer groups, see something, say something, and make sure that we tell these johns don't even think about it because we are going to be going after you? We are going to make sure we arrest you. Your names are going to be publicly displayed.

Give me some advice, I want some ideas. What do we do to go after these individuals?

Ms. VAFA. So there's multipronged things we can do. But I want to first say to Meagan's point, and she talked about the traffickers, there was a report by Shared Hope that looked at 134 cases of men buying sex from minors and 26 percent served no time and 69 percent of those that got sentences had them suspended. So this notion that, you know, even buyers of child sex, like, surely, we hold them accountable, it's just not the case. So you know, in many cases the laws are on the books. We just need, you know, the political will to enforce them.

But there are all sorts of different modules now. You know, there's AI, there's Transaction Intercept which this organization Street Grace is working with tons of law enforcement all over the country to implement. There's all sorts of States in the last couple years, 4 States have made it a felony to buy sex and are working to implement this. I know DHS has been very active in States like Texas and has been doing excellent work.

So it's not necessarily, you know, passing more laws, although in some States that's been incredibly effective.

Mr. CORREA. It sounds like we need to enforce them and, like you said—

Ms. VAFA. Exactly.

Mr. CORREA [continuing]. The political will is needed. Mr. Chairman, I don't know about you, but we are at the Federal level and I would like to see us do something legislatively to make sure that these laws are enforced, Federal laws at the Federal level.

Ms. VAFA. Especially the grant programs that we have under TBPA, making clear that the enhanced collaborative models that traditionally were able to be used for these proactive demand reduction operations can continue to be used to do so. For the last few years, there's been direct language from OVC explicitly banning them from using that funding to do these proactive demand reduction operations because, you'd have to ask OVC, but in our estimation, it's probably because they're seen as, you know, going against sex worker rights. So it's really important to understand—

Mr. CORREA. This is not about the sex worker. These are about the johns.

Ms. VAFA. Exactly. Exactly.

Mr. CORREA. We want to go after the demand.

Ms. VAFA. Exactly. Irrespective, this demand for commercial sex is what drives the market that fuels trafficking. It's very important to realize that we have to target the demand in order to prevent trafficking.

Mr. CORREA. This is just an outrage. I would ask our Chairman and Ranking Member to work together to come up with some kind of a mechanism to make sure we enforce the laws in the book and also make sure that we shame the hell out of these johns and make sure their community knows that they are doing some very bad things in our communities.

Mr. Chairman, I am out of time. Well—

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Chairman, if you'd indulge me for just a second, I want to make something very, very clear. Those numbers are

startling. What we're seeing is that cops and deputies and Federal officials, they're arresting them, they're bringing them in, but we don't set the terms, we don't prosecute them, and we're not sitting on the bench releasing them.

Mr. McCAUL. Right. If I can add to that, as a Federal prosecutor and former State, in the case of gun violence, we were able to move gun cases from State to Federal, where we had mandatory minimum sentencing under the guidelines. Right? Five year, as opposed to sometimes in State courts it fluctuates.

Maybe, Ms. Vafa, if you could elaborate on are there any mandatory minimums for this type of offense under the Federal sentencing guidelines?

Ms. VAFA. So there is a mandatory minimum assigned to the 1591, which is the Federal trafficking crime. Under the Federal trafficking crime, patronize and solicits is part of the trafficking offense. Again, it's just a matter of whether Federal law enforcement and prosecutors will apply that to sex buyers. It's been a part of the law since 2015.

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act made it clear in the sense of Congress, under that law, they addressed the fact that there was some ambiguity given that a couple of Federal cases, you know, essentially dismissed cases that went after sex buyers as part of the Sturgis rally, you know, biker cases. So they wanted to remove all doubt that the word "obtains" could apply to sex buyers. So they added "patronize and solicits." I think many years ago, Congressman Sensenbrenner had added mandatory minimums to 1591. So they are——

Mr. McCAUL. But mandatory minimums take the discretion away from the judge.

Ms. VAFA. Correct.

Mr. McCAUL. They have to impose that mandatory minimum sentence. So I don't understand. Is that not being done?

Ms. VAFA. It's just a matter of if prosecutors are willing to go after sex buyers.

Mr. McCAUL. So it's more on the——

Ms. VAFA. Correct. It's still——

Mr. McCAUL [continuing]. Justice Department and State prosecutors that are not doing this.

Ms. VAFA. Correct.

Mr. McCAUL. Because under the sentencing guidelines, it does provide for that. It is just if they are not going to ask for that as part of the sentencing.

Ms. VAFA. Right. That's my understanding. I mean, there's still some confusion. I mean, even, you know, certain, you know, lawmakers are still unaware of the Federal trafficking definitions. Right? If there's an exchange of sex for anything of value with a minor, that under Federal law constitutes trafficking. Yet, you know, we'll still see instances of confusion in the press or concerning certain matters here. There still seems to be confusion. Whereas all of us——

Mr. CORREA. It should be any sex with a minor——

Ms. VAFA. Correct.

Mr. CORREA [continuing]. Irrespective of where there is an exchange, is a crime.

Ms. VAFA. Right. It's a trafficking——

Mr. CORREA. A minimum.

Ms. VAFA. Right.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Thompson, can you maybe shed some light on this? I am still a little confused. Is this just a matter of maybe at the State level or the prosecutors are not pursuing the mandatory minimum sentencing?

Mr. THOMPSON. I think it's a combination of factors. I think caseloads are overwhelming judges. The caseloads are overwhelming prosecutors. This comes down to dollars and cents because they don't have the money to pay more prosecutors, whether it's U.S. attorneys or local prosecutors.

We can send out more deputies and we can send out more cops. That's not the problem in my district. It's a part of the problem, but it's not the solution. The country has got to decide how serious a crime by a man against a woman for sex trafficking is. You're either going to face the punishment or you're going to get a slap on the wrist.

Mr. MCCAUL. Right.

Mr. THOMPSON. Now, in my estimation, it's the punishment. You're going to be ostracized, to Mr. Correa's point. You're going to carry around that stigma for the rest of your life that you were part of a sex trafficking operation. But the fact is, is that the country's not willing to go there right now.

Mr. MCCAUL. Well, in my experience, the pedophiles were the lowest of the low in the prison system.

Mr. THOMPSON. That's something that, you know, we have to recognize and acknowledge as a government. This is all of us. This isn't Rs and Ds and I's and——

Mr. MCCAUL. No, this is a totally——

Mr. CORREA. I disagree with you. Let's test it. I bet the country is ready to go there.

Mr. THOMPSON. I hope you're right, sir. I'm such a cynic as you—you know me better than many.

Mr. CORREA. No, this is——

Mr. THOMPSON. I hope you're right. I do believe that our parents, our teachers, our doctors and nurses, our cops, everyone in the chain, the social chain, has a huge oar in this. They have to play a role. Parents need to tell their children, look out, be careful, look both ways, not just crossing the street. The doctors that do the physicals and the dentists that check on these kids. Hey, are you aware? Are you thinking about it?

The teachers, the things we're teaching in school today versus the things we should be teaching on common sense, on protecting one another. Watch your fellow student. Is she falling victim? Is there a stranger hanging around the schoolyard? Are they offering you things? Are they playing games? This is common sense, but yet, I can tell you, this is not happening.

Mr. MCCAUL. Well, school districts, like in Courtney's case, they turned a blind eye——

Mr. THOMPSON. Absolutely.

Mr. MCCAUL [continuing]. To her groomer, who was a student, by the way, and then she was fed to the raptors like, you know, like lions.

Mr. THOMPSON. It's liability. They're afraid that the trial lawyers are going to run in and sue them till they're dead.

Mr. MCCAUL. Yeah.

Mr. CORREA. Which they do. Which they should. Which they should.

Mr. MCCAUL. Well, we would like to follow up on this specific area. I was not aware of the mandatory minimum or lack of enforcement thereof. Perhaps work with you, Mr. Correa, Ms. Pou, and Mr. Stone, and all Members of this task force on a solution to this one because I think this could make a serious dent. If you get to the high-profile buyers, you are going to make a real dent in the sort of marketing, if you will, of this criminal enterprise.

Ms. VAFA. It also comes with a \$5,000 mandatory fine that populates into a domestic trafficking victims fund. So there's lots of incentive to up these prosecutions.

Mr. MCCAUL. No. Excellent.

Well, I want to thank the witnesses. This has been a very profound hearing on a very ugly situation in this country and the world. I hope we can make a difference to protect these victims, and we have two before us here today, and thank you for your testimony. I know it is not easy to talk about this publicly, and a lot of victims don't, but it was very valuable to this task force.

So with that, this hearing stands adjourned, and thank you again for being here.

[Whereupon, at 3:46 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

