

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL



2021 HUMAN TRAFFICKING ANNUAL REPORT



DAVE YOST
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL



The Attorney General's Office
protects Ohio and its families.

Our actions are driven by their interests,
guided by the rule of law
and the relentless pursuit of justice.

We seek to constrain evil and empower good,
without partisan preference
or subjective judgment, as defined
by the law and by the Constitutions
of the United States and Ohio.



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OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL



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March 10, 2022

My fellow Ohioans,

Sex trafficking is a market — an illegal one — but a market nonetheless. And like all other markets, it is subject to the law of supply and demand. Traditionally, efforts to stop sex trafficking have focused on the supply side of the equation — arresting, charging and jailing those who provide sex, while giving the buyers a relative slap on the wrist.

Since becoming Ohio Attorney General in January 2019, one of my top priorities has been to curb sex trafficking statewide by attacking the demand side of this equation — the buyers. Without people willing to buy sex, there would be no demand, and thus no incentive for traffickers to exploit emotionally and psychologically vulnerable children and women by turning them into sexual commodities.

When House Bill 431 took effect nearly a year ago, it gave law enforcement and prosecutors an important new tool to use against buyers of sex, with heightened penalties that include mandatory sentencing to what is commonly called “john school.”

In these education classes, convicted sex buyers learn about the ugly workings of sex trafficking and the degrading and abusive practices that traffickers use to control the victims they peddle to buyers. Most important, buyers learn how they perpetuate these evils.

At present, there are a handful of john schools throughout the state. To help communities create their own, the staff of the Ohio Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Initiative created “John School: Guidelines for Sex Buyer Education Programs.” This guidebook aims to ensure that, regardless of the Ohio jurisdiction in which they are convicted, sex buyers receive effective and potentially life-changing education.

Meanwhile, as detailed in the report that follows, the human-trafficking stings and arrests we carried out with law enforcement throughout Ohio in 2021 significantly increased the pressure on traffickers and buyers. This will continue in 2022.

All of our efforts are intended to convey this message to every trafficker and buyer: It is not safe for you to engage in this vile market in Ohio.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Yost".

Dave Yost
Ohio Attorney General

ABOUT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is the illegal use of vulnerable people to make a profit through sex work or labor, a societal scourge that is happening right now throughout Ohio. No community within our borders — whether urban, suburban or rural — is immune.

Ohio defines labor trafficking as “involuntary servitude” and sex trafficking as compelled sex activity for hire.

Sex trafficking can include prostitution, but prostitution does not necessarily constitute sex trafficking. The distinction is easily remembered as “2 vs. 3”: Unlike prostitution, sex trafficking must include a third-party beneficiary, meaning that someone besides the two people engaged in the sexual act is involved. Commonly, the third party — the one who profits — is a pimp, boyfriend or girlfriend, friend or relative.

When people think of sex trafficking, they often imagine a stranger — the third party referred to in Ohio law — pulling up in a van and kidnapping a young victim, or keeping a young woman locked in chains. These perceptions, however, are mostly myth: The vast majority of traffickers know their victims well; many also know their victims’ families. Traffickers rely on building trust and a close relationship with their targets by filling the victims’ needs and, in the process, identifying vulnerabilities. Then they exploit those vulnerabilities to compel their victims into being trafficked.

Labor trafficking, too, is a problem throughout Ohio and the United States. Many people incorrectly believe that only undocumented immigrants are trafficked for labor, but it can happen to those who enter the country legally and to U.S. citizens. Furthermore, labor trafficking can happen within legitimate businesses — construction, food service, agriculture and others — where it hides in plain sight and makes it harder to identify.

People of any age, race, sex or socioeconomic status can fall victim to human trafficking, but certain factors make individuals more vulnerable. The nonprofit Polaris, which operates the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline, identifies the following as significant risk factors:

- Substance use
- Mental health concerns
- Recent migration or relocation
- Involvement with the child welfare system
- Being a runaway
- Homelessness

AG YOST'S HUMAN TRAFFICKING INITIATIVE

Not long after taking office in 2019 as Ohio's 51st attorney general, Dave Yost identified the fight against human trafficking as a top priority of his administration. To that end, he created the Human Trafficking Initiative (HTI), whose mission is to end labor and sex trafficking statewide by building awareness, empowering Ohioans to join the battle within their communities, helping victims, and ensuring that traffickers and johns are brought to justice.

As part of the initiative, HTI team members collaborate with social service agencies, state and federal agencies, law enforcement agencies on all levels, nonprofit organizations and anti-human trafficking coalitions. They have conducted both basic and advanced training for such agencies as well as businesses, community groups, Rotary clubs and more.

Priorities of the HTI

Ending sex trafficking and labor trafficking in Ohio are priorities of the HTI, which on the broadest level aims to equip all Ohioans with the knowledge and resources to recognize the warning signs of human trafficking and report any suspicious activities to the authorities.

More specifically, the HTI team has established these strategies:

- Focus on prevention and education to stem the victimization of one human being for another's profit. These efforts include raising awareness among youths and young adults.
- Promote legislative policy to ensure that Ohio is doing what it can to fight trafficking.
- Assist and train task forces and prosecutors to build human trafficking cases and develop more task forces throughout the state.
- Understand barriers to wraparound services and identify next steps for survivors of human trafficking.
- Reinforce collaboration and discussion among Ohio stakeholders to strengthen and unify community responses to human trafficking.

Because resources and awareness vary widely throughout the state, the connections that the HTI team makes as it travels Ohio are extremely valuable. As team members learn of successes by certain organizations, they work with those groups to spread "best practices" to other communities so that all Ohioans can benefit from effective strategies and shared wisdom.

The HTI team

The members of the HTI team:

- **Jennifer Rausch**, legal director, focuses on education and helps task forces and prosecutors build better cases. She previously led the Special Victims Unit at the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office and continues to prosecute trafficking cases at the state and federal levels in her role at the Attorney General's Office (AGO).
- **Jomel Spurlock**, director of victim services, works to connect and strengthen human trafficking services throughout the state. Before joining the AGO, she worked as a victim advocate for the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force and the Salvation Army, as well as the Palm Beach County's State Attorney's Office.
- **Emily Billman**, anti-human trafficking coordinator, helps to identify gaps in victim services and spread awareness statewide. The 2019 graduate of Miami University has led street outreach teams in Columbus for the anti-trafficking organization Out of Darkness.

The Human Trafficking Initiative team offers multiple trainings, in-person and virtual, to spread the word about the fight against human trafficking. In 2021, the HTI team trained more than 3,700 people. Team members have presented the following programs to private companies, government agencies, law enforcement officers and prosecutors, social service agencies, community groups, student groups and others.

Human Trafficking 101

In this training program, presenters explain human trafficking and how it happens. Attendees also learn:

- How victims are affected and who is vulnerable.
- Who traffickers are and how they operate.
- How misconceptions make people believe human trafficking happens only to other people in other places.
- What red flags to watch out for.
- How demand reduction can help.
- What improvements are being considered for Ohio laws and what those laws say now.
- How you can join the fight.

Advanced Human Trafficking Training

In this program, presenters address:

- What law enforcement and prosecutors need to know.
- How experts are working with victims and survivors of human trafficking.
- What barriers and gaps in services exist.
- How to identify human trafficking victims.
- Why a multidisciplinary team is important.
- What other factors complicate investigations and prosecutions of human trafficking cases.

HTI's partners within the AGO

The fight against human trafficking is a highly collaborative effort involving the AGO, social service agencies, law enforcement agencies, nonprofit organizations and anti-human trafficking coalitions throughout the state. Within the AGO, the HTI team works with the following partners:

- **Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission:** In late 2019, AG Yost reconvened the Ohio Human Trafficking Commission, which originated with Attorney General Richard Cordray and was then reconstituted by Attorney General Mike DeWine. The commission continued to work on important projects throughout 2021. The subcommittees of the commission include Law Enforcement, Victim Services, Research/Gap Analysis and Data, Public Awareness, Demand Reduction, Legal and Legislative, and Healthcare.

The Victim Services subcommittee issued an update to the Standards of Service for Trafficked Persons in 2021, providing guidelines for organizations to develop a strong response for survivors of human trafficking. Those standards are available on the AGO website (www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/HumanTrafficking), and a self-assessment tool should be available in 2022. The Healthcare and Research/Gap Analysis and Data subcommittees wrapped up some big projects in 2021 as well, and those also will be available soon on our website.

Our Advisory Council, made up of people with lived experience, was formalized in 2021. It has been an invaluable addition to the commission. Members are officially known as our Ambassadors, and many have joined our subcommittees. One of the council's publications, "Ambassador Healthcare Recommendations," is in the final editing stages and will be available in 2022.

The commission, set to meet quarterly, is charged with working collaboratively with the Attorney General's HTI team and its partners to help develop methods for ending human trafficking. That work continued throughout 2021, bringing together experts from across Ohio.

- **Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission (OOCIC):** Led by the Attorney General, OOCIC provides structure and support to local law enforcement agencies in Ohio that have uncovered organized criminal entities within their jurisdictions. As a primary tool, OOCIC uses special task forces, which it forms by pairing law enforcement agencies together to combat the criminal enterprises. Multiple task forces target human trafficking in Ohio.
- **Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI):** BCI agents provide staffing, technical expertise and technological resources to human trafficking task forces and local law enforcement agencies. BCI's Special Victims Unit helps local authorities investigate and prosecute those who commit crimes against children, including human traffickers, sexual abusers and other offenders. Additional resources are provided through BCI's Cyber Crimes, Criminal Intelligence and Technical Operations units, including manpower for human trafficking investigations and prosecutions; forensic analysis; training and technical assistance; equipment loans; and victim advocacy. BCI also aggregates trafficking data reported by law enforcement agencies in the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway; the numbers are included in this report.
- **Ohio Peace Office Training Academy (OPOTA):** OPOTA trains law enforcement officers to identify and investigate human trafficking in Ohio. Since Ohio's Safe Harbor Law was enacted in 2012, all new peace officers have been required to participate in an OPOTA-approved course on human trafficking.

The HTI team created a Human Trafficking 101 course for OPOTA Online and teaches a two-day, in-person class at OPOTA once a year.

Human Trafficking Summit

Given his priority on fighting trafficking, Attorney General Yost has committed his office to planning and presenting a statewide Human Trafficking Summit.

The HTI team spent the last third of 2020 organizing the second annual event, which came to fruition on Jan. 14, 2021. COVID-19 restrictions prompted the HTI team to plan an entirely virtual format. Despite the challenges presented by the online format, the summit grew exponentially – more than 1,400 people joined the event. Fifteen workshops – covering health care, social services, law enforcement, government and social justice – were offered. The summit’s success convinced the HTI team of the importance of offering a virtual aspect during future in-person summits.

Preparations for the 2022 Human Trafficking Summit began during the summer of 2021. Ongoing concerns about COVID-19 prompted the HTI team to retain the virtual format for the 2022 event, held Jan. 13. Sixteen workshops were offered, and the keynote was best-selling author, trafficking advocate and survivor Cyntoia Brown Long.

LEGISLATION

By the end of 2020, the legislature had passed House Bill 431, which included several big changes in Ohio law that took effect April 12, 2021, and were immediately put to use. The first was a provision that eliminates the legal distinction between trafficking victims who are younger than 16 and those who are 16 or 17. Under the previous version of Ohio’s trafficking in persons offense (ORC 2905.32), the element of compulsion needed to be proved during prosecutions of cases with victims who were 16 or 17 years old. This provision ran contrary to Ohio laws that treat all people younger than 18 as minors and provided a loophole for many traffickers. The passage of House Bill 431 closed that loophole, extending much-needed protections to all minors in Ohio.

House Bill 431 also provided Ohio with a weapon to use in the fight to end demand – it separated the act of buying sex from the act of selling sex. Now, those who purchase sex will face a first-degree misdemeanor and a fine of up to \$1,500. Judges also must sentence these buyers to “john school,” a class during which they will learn why people buy sex and how sex purchases impact both victims and buyers. To assist Ohio courts with implementing these education programs, the Human Trafficking Initiative spent the last half of 2021 developing “John School: Guidelines for Sex Buyer Education Programs.” This guide, unveiled by Attorney General Yost during the 2022 Human Trafficking Summit, can be found on the AGO website.

Several pieces of legislation were introduced in 2021 to aid in the pursuit of justice for traffickers. HB 276 would create the new offense of receiving proceeds, thereby criminalizing the act of knowingly receiving or acquiring money or anything of value from someone engaged in sexual activity for hire. This offense would be a third-degree felony and a predicate offense for engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity. The intent of this bill is to provide additional offenses for traffickers that can potentially be proved without the victim’s testimony. The bill is currently in the House Criminal Justice Committee.

HB 427 seeks to expand the definition of “compel” as it currently exists for trafficking in persons and compelling prostitution, in recognition of the role that drugs and drug addiction often play in trafficking. This bill would broaden the definition to include “furnishing or offering a controlled substance to the victim, or by manipulating the victim’s controlled substance addiction.” Including this language directly in the Ohio Revised Code is a recognition of the many forms of control and compulsion traffickers may use. The bill was passed by the House and referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

HB 390 seeks to close a loophole in Revised Code Section 2933.82 by including trafficking in persons in the list of offenses where the submission for testing of a collected sexual assault kit is mandatory. It also applies the evidence-retention timelines to these offenses. As it currently exists, 2933.82 states that these kits must be submitted and retained for offenses such as homicide, rape, sexual battery and gross sexual imposition. However, trafficking in persons is currently not included in that list, even though it is a first-degree felony and carries mandatory prison time and requires sex offender registration. The bill seeks to remedy this issue; it is currently in the House Criminal Justice Committee.

LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

As noted, the fight against human trafficking in Ohio is a highly collaborative effort encompassing a wide range of resources statewide. For its part, the Ohio Attorney General’s Office offers investigative resources through regional human trafficking task forces that are overseen and supported by OOCIC; provides training to law enforcement officers through OPOTA; and provides case support through resources housed at BCI, including the Special Victims Unit and the Criminal Intelligence Unit. To help educate the public on the scope of the problem in Ohio, BCI annually reports statewide statistics on human trafficking, as provided by local law enforcement agencies.

Human trafficking task forces

During 2020, three OOCIC human-trafficking task forces operated in the state: the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, with the Columbus Division of Police as the lead agency; the Cuyahoga Regional Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Office; and the Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the Mahoning County Sheriff’s Office.

In 2021, the number of OOCIC human-trafficking task forces in the state doubled, with three new groups joining the ranks. We welcomed the Miami Valley Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office; the Summit County Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the Summit County Sheriff’s Office; and the Southeastern Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the Washington County Sheriff’s Office. This expansion was a big win for all of Ohio, vastly increasing our ability to respond to and investigate human trafficking and exploitation.

Human trafficking tips come in through hotline numbers, emails, calls from concerned community members, parents, social service providers, law enforcement, and health care providers, among others. In 2021, task forces received 627 human trafficking tips, which led to 621 victim interviews and referrals for services. Ohioans have played a significant role in “see something, say something,” creating opportunities for victims to tell their stories and for traffickers to be held accountable through the work of our dedicated law enforcement teams.

Despite the additional challenges posed by COVID-19, task forces and cooperating agencies persisted in bringing traffickers to justice, achieving these notable successes in 2021:

- **January and February:** Most of the task force officers completed an intensive interviewing program called Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview. This training uses the neurobiology of trauma and memory to help investigators better interview victims and witnesses.
- **February:** Members of the Mahoning Valley Task Force arrested Jason Hoffman of Youngstown. He was indicted by a federal grand jury in May on charges related to child sexual abuse materials and enticing a minor.
- **April:** More than 20 law enforcement and social service agencies came together in central Ohio for Operation 614, during which 53 victims were identified and 93 arrests made. This marked the first time that the new “engaging in prostitution” statute was used.
- **June:** In a case investigated by the Central Ohio Task Force, a Franklin County grand jury indicted Jamie Lee Cason on 20 felony counts, including trafficking in persons and drug/weapons charges.
- **July:** The Southeastern Ohio Task Force arrested James Sabolick after a minor from West Virginia was discovered in his car during a traffic stop. Sabolick was 56 at the time and engaged in various sex acts with the minor. He was later indicted by a federal grand jury.
- **October:** In a statewide sting that took an incredible amount of teamwork and coordination, law enforcement throughout the state came together to attack the demand side of human trafficking. Operation Ohio Knows led to the arrests of 161 people seeking to buy sex, including a city council member, a teacher, a firefighter, a professor and a pilot.
- **November:** The Central Ohio Task Force assisted the Fairfield County Sheriff’s Office with two stings targeting buyers of sex; 23 males were arrested and three guns seized.

Separately in November, in the first human trafficking indictment in Lorain County, Steven Gilbert was indicted on 54 counts, with as many as nine victims recovered during the investigation. The Cuyahoga County Task Force assisted in the investigation.

Human trafficking cases often include other illicit activity. In 2021, the task forces seized 48 guns and a variety of illicit drugs, including crack cocaine, methamphetamines, acetyl fentanyl, cocaine and marijuana totaling more than 7,941 grams with a street value exceeding \$530,600.

Law enforcement training

The Ohio Peace Office Training Academy continues to train local law enforcement to both identify and investigate cases of human trafficking throughout the state. Under Ohio’s Safe Harbor Law, all new peace officers are required to take an OPOTA-approved course on investigating human trafficking.

OPOTA underwent significant changes in 2020 as part of a broader effort to bring the highest level of training to Ohio’s law enforcement officers. The HTI team updated the human trafficking courses on OPOTA Online during 2021 and was part of the instruction team for a two-day human trafficking investigation course.

In 2021, a total of 1,675 Ohio peace officers and other law enforcement professionals completed the human trafficking course through OPOTA. That number encompasses 571 new peace officers who took the course as part of required basic training; 1,093 law enforcement officers who completed it through OPOTA Online, the academy’s online classroom; and 11 who completed the course through a class led by an OPOTA instructor.

Law enforcement statistics on human trafficking

In 2020, the HTI team noted some inherent ambiguities in the reporting form that had been used for years by law enforcement and took steps to implement a new one. When the new form launched on OHLEG in March 2021, the HTI team informed law enforcement of the changes. As a result, agencies across the state were able to share additional information about the types of charges that are part of their human trafficking cases. These charges include engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity, compelling prostitution, promoting prostitution, drug trafficking, child pornography, money laundering, domestic violence, felonious assault, rape, weapons under disability, theft, tampering with records and others.

Ohio law requires local law enforcement agencies to collect data on their human trafficking investigations and forward that information annually to the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI). The data collected for 2021 shows that law enforcement reported identifying 92 human trafficking suspects, leading to 50 arrests and 14 successful criminal convictions. It is important to note that many of those reported investigations are still open or ongoing, either with law enforcement or the court system.

Law enforcement agencies also reported the number of potential victims, traffickers and consumers/johns.

Females were the most commonly identified human trafficking victims reported by law enforcement during 2021. Across all categories, there were a total of 138 potential victims identified, including 133 potential victims of sex trafficking and 5 potential victims of both sex and labor trafficking.

Gender	Number of potential victims
Male	5
Female	133
Other	0
No gender listed	0

Age	Number of potential victims
12 & under	0
13-15	4
16-17	12
18-20	10
21-29	50
30-40	50
41-59	10
60-84	0
85 & older	0
Unknown	2

Race	Number of potential victims
White	86
Black	36
Asian/Pacific Islander	12
American Indian/ Native Alaskan	0
Hispanic	4
Multi-Racial	0
Other	0
Unknown	0

In 2021, 33 suspected buyers (aka johns) were identified by law enforcement agencies as consumers of sex trafficking connected to a human trafficking investigation. This number does not include those arrested during the various statewide stings in 2021. No consumers of labor trafficking were identified in 2021.

Gender	Number of suspected consumers
Male	33
Female	0
Other	0
No gender listed	0

Age	Number of suspected consumers
17 & under	0
18-20	0
21-29	3
30-40	13
41-59	12
60-84	5
85 & older	0
Unknown	0

Race	Number of suspected consumers
White	28
Black	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	0
American Indian/ Native Alaskan	0
Hispanic	0
Multi-Racial	0
Other	0
Unknown	0

Law enforcement agencies identified 119 suspected human traffickers in 2021, all of whom were identified as sex traffickers.

Gender	Number of suspected traffickers
Male	98
Female	20
Other	1
No gender listed	0

Age	Number of suspected traffickers
17 & under	0
18-20	2
21-29	29
30-40	55
41-59	27
60-84	4
85 & older	0
Unknown	2

Race	Number of suspected traffickers
White	40
Black	65
Asian/Pacific Islander	8
American Indian/ Native Alaskan	0
Hispanic	3
Multi-Racial	0
Other	2
Unknown	1

Social and economic factors can contribute to trafficking victimization. Law enforcement agencies identified these factors in 2021 cases:

- Criminal history: 12
- Drug, alcohol or other dependency: 28
- Runaway: 10
- Homeless status: 19
- Immigration status: 2
- Unsafe home environment: 8
- Prior victim of abuse (includes sexual, domestic violence, etc.): 15
- Poverty: 20
- LGBTQI+: 1
- Unknown: 53

Trafficking can involve movement of victims across cities, states or the country. Law enforcement agencies identified these modes of transportation in 2021 cases:

- Motor vehicle: 41
- Airplane: 2
- Unknown: 50



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