

California Ballot Initiative Strengthens Human Trafficking Laws

The initiative receives endorsements from key human trafficking organizations

FREMONT, Calif. -- Feb. 19, 2010 -- California Against Slavery is now gathering signatures for a state ballot initiative to strengthen human trafficking laws. The initiative would deter traffickers with stiffer criminal penalties, aid district attorneys in prosecuting human trafficking offenses, increase protection for human trafficking victims, and mandate human trafficking training for law enforcement officers.

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery and its victims are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. It happens in the United States and worldwide.



"We support and desperately need to see revision in our state law with regard to human trafficking," said Jenny Williamson, founder and president of Courage to Be You, a Sacramento-area organization that rescues and restores victims of child sex trafficking. "Severe fines and extended jail time for the perpetrators of this evil must be enacted if ever this crime is to be deterred. Our courageous law enforcement officers must be equipped and encouraged with mandatory, specific training so that rescuing these vulnerable victims and putting their perpetrators away becomes a priority within our state."

The California Against Slavery initiative is endorsed by many organizations combating human trafficking, including Breaking Chains, Captive Daughters, Courage to be You, International Justice Mission (IJM), Lotus Outreach, MISSSEY, Oasis USA, Polaris Project, Shared Hope, and Stop Child Trafficking Now.

"California is a major hub for human trafficking," said Linda Smith, founder and president of Shared Hope International. "We fully endorse the California Against Slavery initiative because we see the strategic importance of having stronger state laws in place in the fight against human trafficking."

Current California law does not reflect the severity of the crime. The proposed changes to state law under the initiative stem from several months of research with experts in the field of human trafficking, including district attorneys, policy-making organizations, and groups that provide direct services to trafficking victims.

A human trafficking offense is currently punishable by a state prison sentence of three to five years for trafficking of an adult or four to eight years for trafficking of a minor. The initiative would increase sentences to six to 16 years for trafficking of an adult and up to 15 years to life for trafficking of a minor. The initiative would further protect minors by allowing district attorneys to prove a charge of sex trafficking of a minor without a showing of force. All human trafficking punishments would also include a fine of up to \$500,000.

The initiative would require law enforcement officers to undergo two hours of training on the issue of human trafficking to increase awareness of the issue and to train officers to better recognize its victims.

Trafficking victims would receive more protection in the criminal justice system under the initiative. Evidence of sexual activity stemming from the trafficking offense would not be admissible for use against the victims to prove their criminal liability for that conduct or to attack their credibility or character. Victims also would have more time to file civil lawsuits against traffickers.

"Human trafficking is an egregious crime against the most basic human rights and it is an important issue for our state," said Daphne Phung, executive director of California Against Slavery. "We are bringing this issue to the voters to give Californians an opportunity to speak up against human trafficking. We hope that every voter in California will sign the petition and ask ten friends and family members to do the same."

California Against Slavery aims to collect 600,000 signatures by March 31, 2010, to place the initiative on the November 2010 ballot.

Please visit <http://www.CaliforniaAgainstSlavery.org> to print and sign the petition, read the full-text of the initiative, or learn more about California Against Slavery.

The California Attorney General's official title for the initiative is: "Expands Types of Criminal Conduct That Constitute Human Trafficking and Increases Criminal Penalties. Initiative Statute."

About California Against Slavery:

California Against Slavery is a non-profit group organized by Californians appalled by the injustice of modern day slavery in our state and around the world.

Our mission is to strengthen California state laws to better reflect the personal and societal impact of human trafficking. Our goal is to pass an initiative on the November 2010 California General Election ballot to strengthen current human trafficking laws and increase victims' rights.

About Human Trafficking:

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery and its victims are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. It happens in the United States and worldwide.

It is difficult to quantify the scope of human trafficking due to the covert nature of the crime, but experts suggest the problem is large and growing.

An unknown number of U.S. citizens and legal residents are trafficked within the United States, primarily for sexual servitude, according to the U.S. Department of State [1]. Many victims are minors. An estimated 286,506 minors in the United States are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation, according to a report from the University of Pennsylvania [2]. Labor trafficking also happens in the United States in domestic service, factories, farms, restaurants, and other work sites.

Worldwide, human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry and it is tied with the illegal arms industry as the second largest criminal industry [3]. An estimated 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States each year, according to the U.S. Department of State [4].

California is a prime target for human traffickers because of its international borders, port cities, large economy, and metropolitan regions [5].

[1] U.S. Department of State
Trafficking in Persons Report 2009
<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/123133.htm>

[2a] University of Pennsylvania, Richard J. Estes and Neil Alan Weiner
The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, September 19, 2001
http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/~restes/CSEC_Files/Exec_Sum_020220.pdf
This report was cited on page 2 of the "Domestic Human Trafficking" report from the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center.

[2b] Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center, U.S. Department of State
Domestic Human Trafficking: An Internal Issue, December 2008
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/113612.pdf>

[3] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Human Trafficking Fact Sheet
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/fact_human.html
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/fact_human.pdf

[4] U.S. Department of State
Trafficking in Persons Report 2004
<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/34021.htm>

[5] California Alliance to Combat Trafficking and Slavery Task Force
Human Trafficking in California Report, October 2007
http://www.ohs.ca.gov/pdf/Human_Trafficking_in_CA-Final_Report-2007.pdf

Contact:

Daphne Phung
Executive Director and Founder of California Against Slavery
info@californiaagainstsavery.org
(510) 473-7283

<http://www.CaliforniaAgainstSlavery.org/>

California Against Slavery
P.O. Box 7057
Fremont, CA 94537