



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Pennsylvania Courts Launch Awareness Campaign to Help Stop Human Trafficking

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania courts today launched an awareness campaign to educate Pennsylvanians about the signs and risk factors of the many forms human trafficking can take and the resources available for victims of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a type of human rights abuse where people profit from the exploitation of others – mainly using force, fraud or coercion to manipulate victims into engaging in sex acts or labor/services in exchange for something of value.

Anyone under age 18 who exchanges sex for something of value are human-trafficking victims, regardless of whether force, fraud or coercion are involved.

While there is much wider awareness about sex trafficking in the U.S., human trafficking also encompasses labor trafficking. In a labor trafficking situation, persons are exploited for cheap or unpaid labor and are sometimes forced to take on unreasonable debt as a condition of employment.

Produced by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, the human-trafficking awareness campaign includes digital ads and videos running on social media platforms in both English and Spanish. The campaign messaging illustrates a variety of human-trafficking misconceptions and the tactics traffickers may use to manipulate women and men.

There is no one-size fits all way to identify a trafficking victim. Human trafficking victimization is complex and can present in numerous, unique ways – sometimes in a courtroom before a judge when a victim or offender is brought up on multiple, unrelated charges.

Some common victim indicators for those being trafficked – both in and out of the courtroom – can include:

- improper or missing identification
- intense fear or emotional numbness
- substance use disorder
- “branding” tattoos (conveying ownership)
- burns, injuries or cuts
- homelessness
- seasonally inappropriate clothing
- lengthy criminal history
- history of past victimization
- confusion about court proceedings

- unusually resigned to their circumstances
- willing to accept a guilty plea without counsel
- wants to rush through proceedings
- providing “canned” or “scripted” answers
- looking toward another person in the courtroom for affirmation before answering questions.

By far, the most recognized belief about human trafficking is that it always involves kidnapping or otherwise physically forcing someone into a situation. In reality, most human traffickers use psychological means such as tricking, defrauding, manipulating or threatening victims into providing commercial sex or exploitative labor.

In order to best help potential victims, it is important to pay attention to interactions within our own family, workplace and community. Understanding the vulnerabilities that can pave the way for victimization and being aware of situations that may raise red flags is key.

Anyone can be trafficked, but it is no coincidence that traffickers recognize and take advantage of people in vulnerable situations.

Trafficking victimization is complicated, and victims do not always self-identify. The fear, shame, trauma, isolation and manipulation inherent in human trafficking can prevent a victim from seeking help or attempting to leave an exploitative situation, no matter how dangerous.

In Pennsylvania, trafficking survivors can petition the court to vacate convictions for prostitution, criminal trespass, disorderly conduct, loitering and prowling at night, obstructing highways and other public passages, and simple possession of a controlled substance if their convictions were sustained as a result of trafficking victimization.

To view the human trafficking campaign, visit <https://www.pacourts.us/learn/human-trafficking>.

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