

## DA Works to End Human Trafficking

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**HUMAN TRAFFICKING** and commercial sexual exploitation have been a hidden plague on our county, state, and nation for many years. In 2009, as San Bernardino County district attorney, I vowed to take a leadership role in ending human trafficking in San Bernardino County. We started by creating the county's Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation (C.A.S.E.), bringing together a partnership of county departments including the District Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Department, Probation Department, and County Superintendent of Schools. C.A.S.E. achieved resounding success in raising awareness and providing enhanced resources to victims.

However, the crime of human trafficking has continued to grow and evolve. Criminal street gangs expanded from trafficking in drugs and guns, to trafficking in human beings. Gangs view human trafficking as a low risk, high profit, renewable resource enterprise. The perpetrators became more sophisticated, utilizing social media to recruit victims, facilitate their crimes, and evade law enforcement.

In 2013 it became clear to me that the District Attorney's Office needed to focus our efforts on more effectively investigating and criminally prosecuting these ruthless exploiters. With the help of Proposition 35 that passed in November 2012, the penalty for human traf-

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ficking increased from an average of six years in prison to 15 years to life, and we needed to fully implement the new law. To accomplish these goals, in March 2013 I created the Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit within the District Attorney's Office. The unit consists of a team of dedicated prosecutors, victim advocates, and investigators. In September 2013 our H.T. Unit obtained the first 15 year-to-life conviction in the state. In that case, the defendant used a Tazer to force the 16-year-old victim to work the streets for him.

To stop human trafficking we also need to stop the customer demand for sexual exploitation. Customers, known as “Johns,” depend on anonymity. In 2013 we created our Stop the John Program. Anyone convicted of soliciting prostitution in our county will have their name, booking photo, and case number posted on our public Website for the entire world to see. This has been a very effective deterrent. Nearby counties have taken our lead and are starting their own Stop the John programs.

As a member of the state Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board (V.C.B.), I brought our mission to stop human trafficking statewide. Previously, V.C.B. rules prohibited human trafficking victims from receiving restitution because the victims themselves were involved in misdemeanor conduct. In December 2013 we changed the VCB rules and now human trafficking victims can receive the same state restitution as all other crime victims.

Lastly, and most importantly, in 2013, thanks to the leadership of our law enforcement partner Sheriff John McMahon, the county’s first Human Trafficking Joint Investigative Task Force was created. The sheriff provided the infrastructure and a detective for the task force, and the District Attorney’s Office provided a senior investigator from our Bureau of Investigation. The joint task force is doing amazing work, uncovering and building cases against human traffickers in our county. Working together, we are sending a message to human traffickers, pimps, and anyone else who enslaves another human being in San Bernardino County: “We are coming after you.”

Fortunately, many prosecutors across the nation feel the same way. From Alameda County District Attorney Nancy O’Malley, whose office has prosecuted more than 350 traffickers since 2005, to Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance, who is working with financial institutions to shut down human traffickers, many of us are already taking significant steps to send the message that this modern day slavery will not be tolerated.

Ultimately though, it can only be effectively addressed if we band together and send a strong, unified message that it will not be tolerated anywhere.

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