To: Governor Janet Mills  
Date: November 08, 2019  
From: Jessica J. Sidelinger – University of Maine Augusta Scholar  
Subject: The Need for a Permanent Human Trafficking Task Force and Data Collection Method

Human Trafficking Task Force and Data Collection in Maine

Human trafficking is a global crisis touching many sectors of society. My research revealed a number of gaps in anti-trafficking efforts and services, and a critical lack of quantitative data on human trafficking in Maine. The number of gaps and lack of data led me to begin researching the necessity of data collection and whether Maine should have a statutorily created Human Trafficking Task Force that would have both a data collection directive and a state legislative reporting requirement.

Gaps in services are a widespread systemic problem throughout the country and Maine is no different. Among the identified gaps are a lack of necessary services, adequate housing, survivor cooperation and self-identification, adequate training programs for professionals who come in contact with trafficking victims, and appropriate laws which protect the survivors and punish the traffickers.

In addition to the gaps in services, there is also insufficient understanding of the existence and scope of human trafficking by the general public, policy makers and legislators. We are only just beginning to understand the totality of the effects trafficking has on survivors and society as a whole. Our comprehension of the sociopathy and psychopathy of traffickers and the numerous methods of coercion they use to control their victims is still in its infancy. Despite all we have learned, there is still far more that we don’t know than what we do know about trafficking models of operation and trafficking survivor victimology. Though there are many people working tirelessly in the anti-trafficking movement, assumptions based on incorrect or anecdotal evidence remains a barrier in closing many of the gaps in both knowledge and action. The near non-existence of quantifiable human trafficking data in Maine remains one of the largest roadblocks in rectifying deficits in knowledge and services.

The Critical Importance of Collecting Data on Human Trafficking

Despite serious concerns about collecting data on human trafficking (i.e. survivor privacy, exposure to criminal liability and methodology issues), it is still considered to be essential to effective anti-trafficking efforts by experts both domestically and internationally. However, the methodology and scope of the information to be included in the data collection is a matter of terrific debate (Hornby, et al., 2015). Data collection is critical to providing us with the knowledge we need to employ the actions we are missing.

With the necessary information we can determine prevalence, assess the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts and survivor services, establish a realistic number of identified and unidentified survivors, adopt the necessary legislation, and dispel human trafficking myths and erroneous assumptions which hamper public awareness efforts. Furthermore, data collection will provide us with information about the different business models traffickers use, particularly the models which are most often operating in Maine. With this knowledge, we will know where to focus our resources and where more are needed.

Anti-trafficking organizations all over the world have recognized the necessity of data collection; the Polaris Project is one such organization. The Polaris Project is the 2002 nonprofit NGO (nongovernment organization) brainchild of two college seniors from Brown University. Derek Ellerman and Katherine Chon founded Polaris in

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1 Human trafficking survivors sometimes don’t realize they are actually victims and therefore do not self-identify as such.  
2 Due to its secretive nature and the ability of traffickers to change and adapt their methods, we are just beginning to learn how a trafficker can exploit their victims for financial gain.  
3 The Polaris Project was built with four founding objectives: providing “trauma-informed” services to human trafficking survivors, human trafficking data collection, strategic anti-trafficking efforts on all forms of human trafficking, and the collaboration and coordination of the anti-trafficking efforts of agencies and organizations (Polaris Project, n.d.).
the wake of a Rhode Island labor trafficking case (Polaris, n.d.). In the past 17 years, Polaris has become an international leader in fighting human trafficking, and collaborates with a variety of both governmental and nongovernmental organizations on projects such as the National Human Trafficking Hotline and the BeFree text line (Polaris Project, n.d.). In accordance with one of its founding objectives, Polaris partnered with IOM (International Organization for Migration) and Liberty Shared to create the largest, most comprehensive database on human trafficking: The Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative.

NGOs and other US states are not the only organizations who understand the necessity of data collection. The US government’s Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with several other government agencies, are currently conducting a research project on data collection with its “Now You See Me: The Human Trafficking Data Collection Project” initiative. In recognition of the significant need for human trafficking data, this project aims to create effective universal methods of collection and eventual implementation. (Now You See Me: The Human Trafficking Data Collection Project, n.d.).

The Necessity of a Human Trafficking Task Force

While researching other states that have a data collection directive, I discovered nearly all of them also have a statutorily (or similar governmental authority) created human trafficking task force. Most of these task forces were charged with implementing a data collection effort; the table below illustrates this trend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Task Force</th>
<th>Enacting Authority</th>
<th>Data Collection Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>State Task Force for the Prevention of Human Trafficking</td>
<td>A.C.A. § 12-19-101</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Arizona Human Trafficking Council</td>
<td>EO No. 2015-12 (12/19/15)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Human Trafficking Council</td>
<td>C.R.S. § 18-3-505</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Trafficking in Persons Council</td>
<td>PA (Public Act) 16-71</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>The Human Trafficking Interagency</td>
<td>D.C.A. § 11-787(k)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Statewide Council on Human Trafficking</td>
<td>Fla. Stat. § 16.617</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Kentucky Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force</td>
<td>Created after passage of KY House Bill 3 The Human Trafficking Victims’ Rights Act</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Massachusetts Interagency Human Trafficking Policy Council</td>
<td>Chapter 178 of the Acts of 2011, § 31</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>No comprehensive statewide task force</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note, like many other states, Maine does have several task forces, coalitions and workgroups devoted towards human trafficking operating around the state. Human trafficking is infinitely versatile with an undetermined number of variables and many of these organizations are: focused on a particular aspect of human trafficking (i.e. sex trafficking) or limited to a particular victim type (i.e. adult women or children, etc.) or only service a particular locality (i.e. covers only specific counties or group of towns). Although some of them collaborate and work together, not all of them do.
Unfortunately, this leaves many gaps along the continuum unaddressed and leads to redundancy in anti-trafficking efforts. The majority of Maine’s efforts are focused on adult sex trafficked women. There are very little resources or services devoted towards male and teens or labor trafficking survivors. A statutorily enacted statewide task force would allow us to collaborate our collective anti-trafficking efforts, address the identified gaps, eliminate redundancy and establish a data collection method that Maine is so desperately lacking.

Human trafficking task forces are recognized by the federal government, as well as numerous other governmental and nongovernmental agencies, as a necessity in creating a cohesive collaborative effort to combating human trafficking. To that end, the Office of Victims of Crime created the “Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide,” which is a “living document” (subject to updating), to provide instruction on establishing a human trafficking task force. The e-Guide covers everything from establishing a task force to survivor support (including the value and need for data collection).

**Policy Recommendation:** Based upon the results of my research, I am recommending that Maine enact legislation to create a statewide human trafficking task force with data collection as one of its founding objectives and an annual reporting requirement to the Maine Legislature. To be effective, combating human trafficking requires a data collection method and a collaborative effort between state and federal agencies, social service agencies and organizations, providers of survivor services, NGOs, advocates, law enforcement, the prosecutor’s office, the judiciary, survivors, members of other anti-trafficking organizations and other involved parties. In general, states who have a comprehensive statewide human trafficking task force also have a directive to develop a data collection method and recognize the importance of collaborating its anti-trafficking efforts.

It is important that the task force be created by statute with a requirement to report to the legislature. An annual reporting requirement by the Task Force will not only bring consistent awareness to Maine’s lawmakers, but will also educate them with empirical facts. This will enable them to enact more effective human trafficking statutes and how to develop more informative policy decisions.

It will not be necessary to reinvent the wheel however, because there is a plethora of research on human trafficking task forces and data collection. For example, there is a strategic plan for combating human trafficking titled “Not Here Strategic Roadmap”4 that was developed by the collaborative efforts of The Foundation of Hope and Grace, the NGO Not Here, law enforcement and other professionals. This document identified gaps in services at the time and offered a timeline of solutions needed to rectify the deficits. Solutions included the importance of a data collection method and of establishing a permanent statewide human trafficking task force by legislation (Legere, et al., 2017). Other US states and the US government who have created a permanent human trafficking task force with a data collection objective (see table in previous section) and other data collection initiatives, are already developing rigorous methodology standards:

1. **Counter-Trafficking Collaborative** – not only could we model our data collection efforts after this database, but we can also learn how to de-identify the data to protect human trafficking survivors’ anonymity ([http://datacollaboratives.org/cases/counter-trafficking-data-collaborative-cide.html](http://datacollaboratives.org/cases/counter-trafficking-data-collaborative-cide.html)).
4. **Migration Data Portal** – contains information and statistics on topics which are affected by or do affect migration patterns across the world; one of the topics they address is human trafficking, which includes the “Multi-System Estimation,” a technique which can be used to predict prevalence of human trafficking (both identified and unidentified victims) in a given country ([https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/human-trafficking](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/human-trafficking)).

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4 The Roadmap can be found at [https://nothere.me/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Not-Here-Strategic-Roadmap_Final2.pdf](https://nothere.me/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Not-Here-Strategic-Roadmap_Final2.pdf)
5. **Treatment Episode Data Sets (TEDS)** – is a national data collaborative which tracks admissions to substance abuse facilities; data is derived from participating state agencies across the country. This could be evaluated for modification to be used in human trafficking data collection.

In conclusion, I urge Maine policymakers and legislators to realize the crucial importance of establishing a permanent human trafficking task force, which should include a data collection directive and a mandatory annual reporting requirement to the state government. Now is the time to stand together, to fight this pervasive threat to society.

References


21 Million People Worldwide are Victims of Human Trafficking. (n.d.). Retrieved Oct 06, 2019, from worldschildren.org: https://www.worldschildren.org/trafficking-guide?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIgM7VzsmH5QIVDoTICh0fiQSyEAAYAiAAEgKZ_PD_BwE


Polaris Project. (n.d.). Retrieved Aug 27, 2019, from polarisproject.org: https://polarisproject.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIrpfI_fyj5AIVBrbIC Ch3imgfpEAAYASA AEGJsH_D_BwE

