



Alliance to End Slavery and
Trafficking
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Human Trafficking Prioritization Act (H.R. 2283)

What does this bill accomplish?

H.R. 2283, introduced in June 2013 by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ), elevates the current J/TIP Office to the level of a Bureau in the State Department and authorizes the State Department to increase the number of Assistant Secretaries from 24 secretaries to 25. As such, the J/TIP Bureau would be headed by an Assistant Secretary and no longer an Ambassador-at-Large.

Why should your office support this bill?

The J/TIP Office, having since been established within the Department of State under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, has proven to be one of the most effective offices in the State Department. The President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships highlighted that the Office has become the center of the U.S. Government's anti-slavery diplomacy, grant-making, and interagency collaboration. Most notably, its annual Trafficking in Persons Report is a powerful tool in the global campaign to end slavery. The tier ranking process outlined in the report has been effective in encouraging governments to address specific gaps in their responses to trafficking.

Anti-human trafficking advocacy groups, former directors of the JTIP Office, and The President's Advisory Council have expressed concerns that the J/TIP Office lacks the stature to effectively advocate on behalf of anti-human trafficking initiatives and have recommended this upgrade in order to increase its ability to lead the global effort to end modern-day slavery. Because of its lower stature in the State Department, the J/TIP Office often gets outranked and overruled when assigning the TIP Report's tier rankings. Thus, placements are made for diplomatic and political reasons as opposed to an accurate reflection of a country's work to eradicate sex and labor trafficking.

Two former J/TIP Office directors, Ambassador Mark Lagon (2007-2009) and Ambassador John Miller (2002-2006), support elevating the Office to a Bureau to be headed by an Assistant Secretary. Lagon notes the challenges he confronted when negotiating with the Regional Bureaus on the tier rankings for the annual Trafficking in Persons Report. He testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations and stated "the State Department does a tremendous job in producing a report which tells it like it is, offering objective rankings. Yet at times it pulls punches, typically due to the urging of regional specialists rather than the TIP Office's dedicated experts on trafficking."

H.R. 2283 establishes the issue of slavery as a significant U.S. foreign policy goal and helps in further protecting the integrity of the annual Trafficking in Persons report. Designating the J/TIP Office as a Bureau headed by an Assistant Secretary would not have any budgetary implications and would greatly improve the organizational support for combatting trafficking, increasing the likelihood that the tier rankings in the annual TIP Report are made solely on a country's efforts to combat sex and labor trafficking and not influenced by any other political considerations.

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