



Alliance To End Slavery & Trafficking

ATEST Applauds Anti-Trafficking Legislation Becoming Law, But Deeply Concerned by Presidential Statements and Government Shutdown

WASHINGTON — Four key pieces of legislation that form the architecture of America’s federal response to human trafficking and modern slavery are now law. In the final days of the 115th Congress, the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act ([H.R.2200](#)) and three related measures ([S.1311](#), [S.1312](#) and [S.1862](#)) received near-unanimous congressional approval. The president has signed the four measures, making them law.

ATEST applauds passage of this vital legislation. The laws reauthorize federal anti-trafficking spending and include important new provisions — such as vacating criminal convictions of trafficking survivors, improving the integrity of the State Department’s annual Trafficking in Persons Report, and integrating anti-trafficking activities into multilateral bank development programs.

However, ATEST is deeply concerned by signing statements the White House has quietly issued indicating the administration might not implement key components of these acts of Congress. The president has pledged to make the fight against human trafficking a priority. ATEST urges the administration, federal agencies and congressional oversight committees to ensure that America’s new anti-trafficking laws are fully implemented.

During last week’s Oval Office signing ceremony, the president also asserted that building a wall along the southern U.S. border is essential to stopping human trafficking. ATEST is deeply concerned that such false statements will actually endanger victims, not help them — as those desperate to cross the border will take more risks, increasing their vulnerability to traffickers. Moreover, such politicized rhetoric takes the focus away from initiatives that will actually reduce human trafficking in the U.S.

Calling the construction of a border wall a humanitarian project that will end human trafficking also fails to recognize that many trafficking victims are U.S. citizens, and that many foreign-born trafficking victims in the U.S. came here legally on temporary work visas.

The U.S. government appropriated only approximately \$200 million in Fiscal Year 2018 to fund key programs at agencies that address human trafficking and modern slavery, including programs run by the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, Labor, State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. An additional \$5.7 billion, the sum currently being proposed by the administration for Fiscal Year 2019 for the Dept. of Homeland Security to begin construction of a border wall, could be directed toward comprehensive whole-of-government anti-trafficking strategies to have a more positive impact on reducing human trafficking and supporting trafficking survivors both in the U.S. and worldwide.

The current government shutdown and impasse over federal spending is hurting many individuals, including trafficking victims and survivors, who desperately need the federal government's assistance. When the government is closed, survivors are denied access to basic services such as housing and medical care, programs to prevent trafficking are halted, and many of the agencies that apprehend and prosecute traffickers are hindered. ATEST calls on the administration and Congress to fully fund and reopen these programs immediately.

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ATEST is a U.S. based coalition that advocates for solutions to prevent and end all forms of human trafficking and modern slavery around the world. We advocate for lasting solutions to prevent labor and sex trafficking, hold perpetrators accountable, ensure justice for victims and empower survivors with tools for recovery. Our collective experience implementing programs at home and abroad provides our coalition an unparalleled breadth and depth of expertise. ATEST member organizations include: Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), Free the Slaves, Human Trafficking Institute, National Network for Youth (NN4Y), Polaris, Safe Horizon, Solidarity Center, T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, United Way Worldwide, Verité, and Vital Voices Global Partnership.