

May 1, 2023

Dear Members of Congress,

As a group of civil society organizations working directly with human trafficking survivors, and leading efforts to dismantle the systems that allow human trafficking to flourish in this country, we write today to share our perspectives on the importance of the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline (the "Hotline"), operated by Polaris.

Recent estimates indicate that 28 million people are trafficked worldwide. Each year, in this country alone, thousands of victims and others bravely decide to seek help in cases of sex and labor trafficking via the Hotline. Since 2007, the Hotline, a lifeline for a person experiencing exploitation in the U.S., has received tips on more than 82,000 human trafficking cases concerning nearly 165,000 victims.

We commend Congress for the support and resources it has provided to the Hotline for more than 15 years. The Hotline serves as a centralized mechanism in the U.S. to connect victims of severe forms of trafficking in persons with service providers. The Hotline provides several safe communication channels for those seeking help and shares critically important information about safety and other available resources. Trained Hotline advocates take tips of suspected sex and labor trafficking and help survivors build plans to leave their situations safely or get the help they need to rebuild their lives.

The Hotline's operating procedures are governed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Trafficking in Persons (OTIP). Those procedures, which have remained consistent for more than a decade, have enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress and across Administrations since the Hotline's inception in 2007, largely because they employ well-established person-centered, trauma-informed approaches. This approach is widely recognized as best practice in the anti-trafficking sector and across the broader victim services field. More specifically, in accordance with the terms of funding provided by HHS, the Hotline "defer[s] to the [adult] individual seeking assistance on if, and when, to report their case to law enforcement, unless required to do otherwise by state-mandated child welfare reporting requirements."

Adult survivors of human trafficking must be able to make their own decisions about whether or not to report to law enforcement. Victims calling the hotline are in the best position to make this judgment call. They know the threats that they are facing, can best assess the potential danger of law enforcement intervention, and should have the power to determine when -- and if -- law enforcement should be alerted to their report. Putting this power back into the hands of trafficking victims is a core tenet of trauma-informed, person-centered approaches to the provision of services. Moreover, providing trafficking victims with the ability to make their own decisions on reporting and escape ultimately supports efforts to bring traffickers to justice. According to the Department of Justice, survivors who feel safe and

receive available resources to begin the long process of rebuilding their lives are “more capable and willing to present strong evidence and testimony in the prosecution of perpetrators, thereby helping to accomplish important justice and restitution goals.” Moreover, our organizations have seen firsthand that victim-centered approaches serve as a critical form of healing for many survivors who lost control over their own decision-making while being trafficked.

We join with survivor advocates in the National Survivor Network who have [voiced their opposition](#) to the requested changes proposed by some state Attorneys General. While the U.S. continues to appropriate resources and adopt laws to improve our domestic response to human trafficking, we urge Congress to resist calls to reverse long-standing procedures that center human trafficking responses on the survivor. Anything short of that would make survivors less willing to come forward, thereby delaying or destroying their ability to recover and deterring their participation in important criminal justice proceedings to hold traffickers accountable.

Sincerely,

Albany County Crime Victim and Sexual
Violence Center

Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking

American Women's Medical Association -
Physicians Against the Trafficking of
Humans (AMWA-PATH)

Callisto

Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc.

Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking

CommonSpirit Health

Covenant House

Erase Clinic

Free the Slaves

Freedom From Exploitation

Freedom United

Global Fund to End Modern Slavery

HEAL Trafficking

Human Trafficking Search

Humanity United Action

Kids in Need of Defense

Love146

McCain Institute at Arizona State University

Mosaic Family Services

My Life My Choice

National Network for Youth

Restore NYC

SWLA Abolitionists

The Avery Center

The Freedom Fund

The Human Trafficking Legal Center

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