



To: House & Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

From: Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST)

Date: March 20, 2026

Re: FY27 Recommendations for Anti-trafficking Programs

The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST) thanks you for your leadership in the fight to end forced labor and human trafficking. We are grateful for the support these programs have received for more than 25 years, when Congress first passed the blueprint for America's anti-trafficking response, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

Human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal industries in the world, affecting 28 million people and generating more than \$236 billion in annual illicit profits. It is more than a criminal justice issue, it affects America's economy, workers and national security. We can eradicate trafficking only by dedicating the necessary resources.

This memo provides concrete recommendations from ATEST, a nonpartisan coalition of leading anti-trafficking organizations working throughout the United States and around the world. ATEST urges Congress to hold the line in FY27 by appropriating not less than the amounts enacted for FY26, and approve increases where possible to meet actual need. The Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education play vital roles, as detailed below.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

International Labor Affairs Bureau: We request not less than the FY26 appropriation for ILAB of \$116,000,000, although we also urge Congress to reinstate an appropriation to allow ILAB to resume grantmaking to civil society organizations. An appropriation of \$213,000,000 would meet actual need. ILAB is an essential part of the U.S. government's international response to forced labor, human trafficking, and child labor. It is responsible for implementing Section 105(b)(2) of the TVPRA of 2005 (P.L.109-164) and Section 110 of the TVPRA of 2008 (P.L.110-457). Funding will allow ILAB to fulfill its congressional mandates including: producing annual findings on worst forms of child labor in U.S. trade beneficiary countries; the development and maintenance of a list of goods prohibited from entering the U.S. marketplace because they are produced by child or forced labor, including inputs to goods made with child or forced labor; and increased responsibilities in enforcing the U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA). Adequate funding will ensure that staff is able to travel to the countries with which ILAB has partnered or where important research is needed to accurately maintain the list of goods made with forced labor or child labor. A robust and expertly staffed entity is tremendously important to the government's ability to tackle

human trafficking and address the underlying factors that place individuals at risk. ILAB provides valuable expertise through its extensive participation in the interagency Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force implementing the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (P.L. 117-78).

ILAB has assisted U.S. businesses to comply with prohibitions on the importation of goods tainted by child or forced labor through grants to civil society organizations that conduct training and have developed online digital tools such as Sweat & Toil and Comply Chain. While advancing new bilateral trade pacts, the U.S. government has included provisions to prohibit forced labor and reduce worker vulnerability to trafficking in countries that export products to the United States (Indonesia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, Bangladesh and Taiwan). Forced labor overseas affects the American homeland, so American initiatives to reduce international exploitation benefit U.S. security and economic interests. Because forced labor import bans are a central part of U.S. trade strategy, the United States should back up these commitments with practical, sustained technical support for trading partners. The complete elimination in 2025 of ILAB grants to organizations that provided targeted upstream trafficking prevention in supply chains for American businesses reduces the U.S. effort to combat human trafficking abroad and its impacts at home. Restoring ILAB's grantmaking budget can help countries strengthen and effectively carry out their existing laws, improve customs and import control systems, and build the capacity of labor inspectorates and enforcement agencies. U.S. leadership in providing this kind of hands-on assistance — and in encouraging coordination across governments — will be critical to making sure forced labor prohibitions work in practice, not just on paper.

Wage and Hour Division: ATEST recommends no decrease in funding for the Wage and Hour Division. An appropriation of not less than \$350,000,000 is needed to meet actual need. Among its many responsibilities, the division enforces fundamental worker protections that are critical to preventing forced labor violations, including minimum wage, overtime, child labor, recordkeeping, and anti-retaliation requirements under the [Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)](#); the wages and working conditions under the [Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act \(MSPA\)](#); and the enforcement of the labor standards under the [Immigration and Nationality Act \(INA\)](#) for certain temporary nonimmigrant workers. Despite vast enforcement responsibilities, WHD is understaffed and vastly underfunded.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Administration for Children and Families, Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP): ATEST recommends not less than the FY26 enacted level of \$30,755,000, but an appropriation of \$260,000,000 would come closer to meeting actual need. OTIP grants to non-governmental organizations provide comprehensive, trauma-informed services to trafficking victims and survivors. The funds should serve both those who are U.S. Citizens or Lawful Permanent Residents. OTIP grant funding is crucial to providing victims of labor or sex trafficking the necessary aid and services once they have been

identified as a victim. Survivors suffer devastating consequences, including psychological and physical trauma, fear of law enforcement, family estrangement, and loss of housing and income. Specialized services are necessary to support survivors to recover and build a support system to prevent re-exploitation and revictimization. OTIP also funds the National Human Trafficking Hotline, a toll-free 24/7 crisis call center that connects victims and survivors of human trafficking with anti-trafficking services in their area (including emergency shelter, case management, and legal services), collects information on human trafficking situations, and, when appropriate, reports actionable tips to law enforcement. HHS awarded the hotline contract renewal in 2025 to a relatively inexperienced organization, ending a two-decade relationship with the survivor-led NGO that founded the hotline and operated it successfully. It will be important moving forward to monitor the new contractor's operations to ensure that cases are reported to law enforcement only if the trafficking victim wants that to occur. ATEST recommends the committee include report language requiring HHS to thoroughly and transparently monitor whether unwanted referrals to law enforcement are occurring. ATEST further recommends that committee report language direct OTIP to publish notices of funding opportunities for civil society organizations within the first 120 days of the new fiscal year and ensure all funds are awarded by the end of the same fiscal year to avoid gaps in service delivery.

Administration for Children and Families, Runaway and Homeless Youth Act: We recommend an appropriation of \$362,000,000 to implement Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs, Title III of the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act. RHYA programs have been chronically underfunded since its inception, despite these programs costing less than other systems that many youth experiencing homelessness and survivors of trafficking encounter. Everyone should have the opportunity to succeed regardless of their start in life, but young people who are trafficked and youth experiencing homelessness are not plugged into the networks, resources, and supports they need for healthy development. Runaway and homeless youth are particularly at risk of becoming victims of trafficking because they lack basic life needs, such as shelter, food, health care, and are disconnected from systems of care and caring adults. An estimated 4.2 million young people (ages 13-25) experience homelessness annually, with many becoming victims of sex trafficking or forced labor in cities, suburbs, rural communities, and American Indian Reservations across the country. The cost of not investing in the lives of youth experiencing homelessness is an economic burden that affects the young person, taxpayers, and society. For the past 50 years, RHYA has provided base funding to communities across the country to develop community-based responses to youth and young adult homelessness and trafficking. These local systems of care are based on the unique needs of each region, their available resources, and local priorities. When we support young people experiencing homelessness, we prevent trafficking. RHYA programs are also trained in identifying and serving survivors of trafficking. Specifically, RHYA funds: emergency shelters, family reunification when safe, aftercare, street outreach, education, employment training, behavioral and mental health care, transitional housing, and independent housing options. This support achieves the following successful outcomes for youth: 1) safe exit from homelessness and hopelessness; 2) family reunification and/or

establishment of permanent connections in their communities; 3) education, employment, and sustainable independence; and 4) prevention of human trafficking. Further, these programs are best positioned to prevent trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation and provide early identification of and services to youth victims of crimes.

Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement: ATEST recommends not less than \$5,000,000 for Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) facilities that are required to release unaccompanied minors when they reach their 18th birthday. In cases where reunification has not yet been achieved, one of the alternative approved discharge resources is a Runaway and Homeless Youth shelter, a system that is overwhelmingly under-funded across the country. In order to meet the needs of these unaccompanied youth, the majority of whom need only short-term support, we request funding for ORR programs to subcontract with federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act grantees to provide housing and supportive services for unaccompanied youth who transition out of ORR facilities that are not yet reunified. This funding is for community-based youth organizations who provide housing, supportive services, reunification support, travel, education, employment, translation services, and other services the young people need.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

McKinney-Vento Act Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program: ATEST recommends \$300,000,000 to implement the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program (EHCY), as authorized by section 722(d)(3) of the McKinney-Vento Act as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (P.L. 114–95). EHCY removes barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and opportunity for success for homeless children and youth; all of whom are at high risk of human trafficking. The EHCY is effective in addressing youth homelessness. With the support of EHCY grants, local education agencies have provided identification, enrollment and transportation assistance, as well as academic support and referrals for basic services. The EHCY has given homeless children and youth the extra support they need to enroll and succeed in school.

Homeless children and youth are particularly at risk for human trafficking. Under the McKinney-Vento Act's EHCY, all school districts are required to designate a homeless liaison, who proactively identifies homeless children and youth, connecting them to vital services like food, housing, and clothing. Under the Act, school districts are also required to provide transportation to stabilize the educational experiences of homeless students. Because all school districts — even those in communities without youth shelters — must designate a liaison for homeless students, schools are uniquely positioned to identify youth who are being trafficked, or are at risk of being trafficked, and provide connections to services. Yet many liaisons are designated in name only, and lack the time and the training to carry out their duties. This lack of capacity is particularly severe in light of the increase in student homelessness. Funding for the EHCY will support a dedicated infrastructure within the nation's public schools to identify and serve children and youth who are at very high risk of human trafficking.

As a champion for the victims of trafficking, you understand the complexities of these issues and the resources needed to respond. We thank you for your consideration and your continued leadership. If you have any questions, please contact ATEST Director Terry FitzPatrick (terry.fitzpatrick@atest-us.org or 571-282-9913).