

Ohio Trafficking in Persons Study Commission
Training and Law Enforcement Subcommittee
Report on Status of Law Enforcement Training and Interagency Communication

To

Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray

Training and Law Enforcement Subcommittee Members

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Introduction

Well-trained law enforcement officers are critical for combating human trafficking in Ohio. The members of the Ohio Trafficking In Persons Study Commission's Training and Law Enforcement Subcommittee believe that the current efforts to train law enforcement are producing results and must be maintained. It is important that the material presented remains up-to-date especially should state law be amended to better address human trafficking activity.

Mechanisms are needed to foster cross jurisdictional communication and cooperation in order for law enforcement to be successful in working human trafficking cases. The members of the subcommittee believe that this can most effectively be accomplished through the creation of regional law enforcement specific working groups.

The Need for Training

The lack of training for law enforcement on the issue of human trafficking can result in missed opportunities to recognize and effectively assist victims. The nature of human trafficking creates situations where victims will not easily disclose to law enforcement, thus placing the burden on the investigating officer to recognize red flags and look more closely at a case.

As was reported by the United States Department of Justice in a recently released a report entitled "The National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction," traffickers go to great lengths so that their victims become emotionally and psychologically connected to them. This is done by employing tactics such as separating victims from their families and friends, introducing drug and alcohol dependency, and inflicting pain through physical abuse, torture, or starvation. Taken together these methods can lead to a level of control that makes the victim reluctant to leave their trafficker.

An interest in understating more about this issue has been seen. A survey was distributed to 950 law enforcement agencies across Ohio in August 2009 by the Central Ohio Rescue and Restore Coalition and the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Of the 106 responses that were received a majority expressed doubts regarding their ability to recognize the signs of labor and sex trafficking. As well, over half recognized that their agency needed training focused on human trafficking.

The City of Toledo and the State Highway Patrol are prime examples in Ohio where increased training among law enforcement has produced significant results. Officers from the Toledo Police Department and Ohio State Patrol are more aware of this issue as a result of targeted training and enforcement efforts.

The Toledo Police Department initiated its efforts after a series of high-profile cases originated in the area. This resulted in the creation of a federally-funded Innocence Lost Task Force that has helped to focus and coordinate enforcement efforts. During the

FBI's Innocence Lost National Initiative targeting juvenile prostitution dubbed "Operation Cross Country," the Toledo-based task force has been in the top five nationally in numbers of recovered/identified child victims and arrests of those involved in prostitution activities.

The Ohio State Patrol initiated its training and awareness program during their 2008 in-service. The number of human trafficking investigations has doubled in each subsequent year since training was first offered.

Status of Training for Law Enforcement in Ohio

Significant strides have been made in the area of training for law enforcement regarding human trafficking in the past year. Prior to the creation of the Ohio Trafficking in Persons Study Commission, training options for state and local officers was limited to the Ohio State Highway Patrol's Introduction & Awareness Training and scattered independent courses. The Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (OPOTA), a section of the Ohio Attorney General's Office along with representatives of the Ohio State Patrol, Columbus Police, Polaris Project and others convened a working group in August of 2009 to develop an introductory class that now provides an overview of human trafficking and basic investigative techniques. Elements from all of the participants' individual trainings were combined to create the joint baseline product for Ohio law enforcement.

The four-hour introductory course covers key areas including defining human trafficking under federal and state law, distinguishing human trafficking from alien smuggling, highlighting general victim and perpetrator profiles, highlighting sex and labor trafficking networks, identifying victim and location red flags, understanding victim mindsets, and providing state and local law enforcement with action steps.

The class, "Human Trafficking: Basic Overview," was first offered by the Academy in November 2009. Since then nearly 400 officers have taken it at OPOTA's facilities in Richfield and London.

Recognizing that tight budgets have made it difficult for some law enforcement agencies to release staff to attend trainings, the Peace Officer Training Academy's e-learning tool, eOPOTA is being used to offer two human trafficking courses on-line free of charge. As of July 2010, over 450 officers have completed the awareness class and over 250 have finished the class focused on responding to human trafficking cases. Versions of these courses are now also available for the general public. They are posted on-line at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.Gov/humantrafficking.

The Northwest Ohio Crimes Against Children Task Force is working with OPOTA on the next phase of training and are preparing a one-day advanced investigations course on human trafficking. It is anticipated that this class will be offered three times in 2011 at locations around the state. OPOTA is not the only source for law enforcement training on human trafficking.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol, a 1,500 person agency, has trained all of their officers and civilian personnel in human trafficking. The 2008/2009 in-service program initiated the basic course and in 2010 an advanced course will be offered. This is especially important as the patrol has primary responsibility for enforcing the laws on Ohio's interstates. The Ohio State Highway Patrol continues to provide training to outside law enforcement and the public, and has provided this training to over 3,000 federal, state, and local officers since 2008.

The Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association offered a session at their April 2010 training conference. The class was presented by trainers from the United States Department of Justice's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit.

Human trafficking awareness is included in presentations to law enforcement by the Attorney General's Missing Children Clearing House. Recently, presentations have been offered at the national D.A.R.E. America conference as well as for suburban Columbus police agencies.

The Buckeye State Sheriffs Association included training on human trafficking during their 2010 annual meeting and training.

The Polaris Project, a national human trafficking advocacy organization, has provided training for law enforcement in Ohio. An eight-hour class was provided at the Ohio Police Juvenile Officer Association's 2010 annual conference. A two-hour briefing was provided to the instructors at the Cleveland Police Department's training academy in January 2010 so that they could begin teaching the subject.

Training Recommendations

The members of the Training and Law Enforcement Subcommittee recognize that many may advocate for mandatory training requirements. The budget constraints facing many communities and departments do not make this a sound option at this time. We support continued efforts by OPOTA to develop and offer training opportunities. Care must be taken to ensure that the content of these trainings remain up-to-date especially should additional anti-trafficking laws be adopted at the state level.

The development and distribution of a roll call video would be an excellent next step. This approach would be low cost tool to reach larger numbers of police officers and sheriff's deputies with the basics regarding human trafficking.

Interagency Cooperation to Combat Trafficking

Ohio is a home rule state with a strong tradition of local self-governance. As a result there are nearly 900 police departments and sheriffs' offices, and no single agency with original jurisdiction over human trafficking on a statewide basis. This can pose a challenge for law enforcement, even those agencies with many trained personnel, as human traffickers often transport and/or exploit their victims in multiple jurisdictions.

The creation of task forces or informal working groups is a way for law enforcement to work cooperatively with one another across traditional jurisdictional lines to identify and pursue cases.

The Toledo-based Northwest Ohio Violent Crimes Against Children Task Force is the only human trafficking specific task force in Ohio that addresses domestic sex trafficking of children. The Task Force is one of 38 funded through the national Innocence Lost Initiative. Innocence Lost is a joint effort between FBI, U.S. Department of Justice Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Members of the task force must all sign memorandums of understanding that memorialize their commitment to the group. Financial resources are committed by participating agencies including the assignment of fulltime staff. The Task Force is made up of FBI, Toledo Police, Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, Lima Police Department and the Fulton County Sheriff's Office. The Ottawa and Wood County Sheriffs are expected to join in fiscal year 2011.

In Columbus a working group made-up of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Attorney's Office, Ohio State Highway Patrol and Columbus Division of Police was formed in 2009 to address human trafficking. This approach has not required formal participation agreements or the commitment of specific resources. It does facilitate communication and can lead to more formal partnerships on a case by case basis.

Interagency Cooperation Recommendations

The members of the sub-committee believe it is important for regional law enforcement working groups to be formed. These organizations would be valuable in their ability to gather multiple jurisdictions together to discuss individual cases or trends that are being seen. These groups could be developed in conjunction with a community anti-trafficking coalition. Law enforcement should weigh the potential for including victim service providers as part of a working group. The service providers offer critical services when victims are located and they may be a source of valuable intelligence for law enforcement.

It is our recommendation that the agency with the primary jurisdiction in a targeted area spearhead the development of the group. Typically the vice unit officers will have the most accurate picture of the current problem and can provide the most insight.

A working group would be more cost effective than a formal task force. Agencies would only commit the time for staff to attend the periodic meetings. Should the working group be successful in generating cases and convictions, it could increase the level of interest to form and provide the resources necessary to operate a task force. The numbers generated by a working group could also provide the justification necessary to secure federal grant dollars.

Those convening a regional working group should contact the Ohio State Highway Patrol, Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the United States Attorney's Office to invite their participation. The Missing Children Clearing House is also a valuable resource that can be called upon. A broad group is important as this crime is rarely localized and will most likely encompass interstate activity and the movement of proceeds and victims outside of a local agency's jurisdiction. This will also assure that no single agency is over tasked.

The sub-committee also recommends that steps be taken to ensure investigators around the state can communicate with each other regarding human trafficking activity.

We recommend that the Attorney General's Office should have a staff person designated as a coordinator focused on the issue of human trafficking. This individual would work with the various regional law enforcement groups to facilitate information sharing. As part of this they should track Ohio-related tips called into the National Human Trafficking Resource Center. The Resource Center is the national toll-free, 24-hour hotline operated by the Polaris Project and funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Monitoring for potential federal grants to support human trafficking law enforcement efforts would also be a responsibility for this individual.

The subcommittee members also recognize the potential that exists for connecting investigators through existing law enforcement specific computer networks. By creating avenues for investigators to communicate in forums that are secure and only accessible to law enforcement a virtual statewide working group would be possible.

In particular it is recommended to investigate the creation of this type of tool within the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG) system managed by the Ohio Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation. OHLEG is currently home to a number of data sources that can be accessed by law enforcement to obtain information that is needed for investigative purposes. Online classes through eOPOTA are also found at this location.

Conclusion

Law enforcement officers who are trained about human trafficking and know key warning signs to look for are vital in the fight against human trafficking in Ohio. The efforts that are underway to develop appropriate training must be continued. Due to the nature of human trafficking, it is important that law enforcement officers have a forum where they can discuss cases and gain assistance from other agencies when appropriate. Local law enforcement should consider the creation of human trafficking working groups. Efforts must also be made at the state level to support these regional groups and ensure that key information is widely shared among investigators.