



# **SPEAKER'S TASK FORCE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

## **JERRY O'CONNOR, TASK FORCE CHAIR**

For Immediate Release  
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### **Statement from Chairman Jerry O'Connor (R-Fond du Lac) on the Speaker's Task Force on Human Trafficking's Final Report**

Today we will present our Formal Report for the Task Force on Human Trafficking to Assembly Speaker, Robin Vos. In August, the Speaker created a bi-partisan Task Force and appointed me as Chair to address the tragedy and heartbreak that surrounds Human Trafficking with a special emphasis on sex and child-sex trafficking in Wisconsin.

This report is a product of our hearings held during the past four months where our Human Trafficking Task Force attempted to better understand how trafficking is affecting our society, especially young people. We held two hearings here in the Capitol, one at UW Oshkosh and one at UW Milwaukee.

In general, the members came into our hearings with a limited oblique idea about the issue of sex trafficking here in Wisconsin. Once we began hearing testimony, especially from amazing, and I mean amazing, law enforcement personnel assigned to these cases we began to understand how difficult it is to identify, track, and prosecute traffickers and sex solicitors.

They described how sex trafficking includes a victim most often being controlled by drugs, alcohol, false family connections, force, fraud, and coercion, followed by a dependency for housing, food, and basic essentials.

The trafficker will even allow a trafficking victim to bring a baby into the world, and then turn around, and further coerce the victim to keep selling herself in order to protect her child. While most of the victims are females, male victims are also enticed into this life. Law enforcement describes the majority in this group as the "exploitation of the vulnerable".

Many reports document that roughly 70% of sex trafficking victims are introduced to prostitution as minors. A surprising percentage of those individuals are introduced into this life by their Mothers.

We were impressed with how law enforcement identifies those who are being trafficked and how they then work with victim support organizations to provide help to victims. This is a tough, tough assignment and we want to thank each of these brave, caring individuals from law enforcement.

Then as we listened to 13 not-for-profit victim support organizations that are working with trafficked victims, we began to get a glimpse of how dark this underworld experience is.

We heard from organizations that have worked with literally hundreds of sex trafficking victims. Who knew? Their testimony helped us realize that once a life has been trashed through sex trafficking. It may take a lifetime to find what we generally think of as a normal life for these victims. You and I can only imagine how hard the recovery process can be for many.

We came away with the highest respect and appreciation for the many volunteers and staff members of these not-for-profit organizations who sacrifice so much to make a difference in the lives of these victims.

After our hearings and input from so many experts and witnesses, there was a fairly clear pathway as to how this Task Force could work to make a difference in this area of our society.

This resulted in our bi-partisan Task Force Report introducing and recommending 11 new bills because we shared a common concern for the overall issues and thereby lent our names to this report.

Here is a brief rundown of the bills addressed in our Task Force Report. For more details, please log onto our Task Force website at <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/assembly/committees/human-trafficking/> or track our bills after they are released today:

**LRB 5214:** Establish a statewide Human Trafficking Council.

**LRB-5251:** Increase sex trafficking education awareness in our public schools

**LRB-5359:** This bill provides for sex trafficking awareness training in a group of businesses, lodging, or housing settings where trafficking has been observed.

**LRB-3999:** This bill provides for sex trafficking awareness training in *schools* of cosmetology, barbering, tattoo, nails, massage, and other specialty schools

**LRB-5375:** Currently the DOJ provides a poster, that is available online, that includes information on the human trafficking resource center hotline. This bill adds to the list of businesses participating in this program

**LRB-5059:** This bill introduces penalties for soliciting prostitution. It also includes a component to offer sex addiction education that could reduce their sentence

**LRB-5315:** This bill will create a pathway for sex trafficking victims to file for civil cause of action against a trafficker

**LRB-5212:** This bill adds keeping a place of prostitution to the current list of sex offenses for which a person must register as a sex offender.

**LRB 5216:** This bill establishes a \$2.5 million matching grant program that will be used to help support not-for-profit victim support organizations

**LRB-5453:** This bill increases the age whereby the Court may approve a motion to have a child under 18 years of age able to testify at a hearing by television from a room other than a courtroom.

In addition to these recommended bills from the Task Force report, there are references to bills introduced outside of the Task Force and other initiatives that are recommended for future consideration. The bottom line is that our goal is to “set these captives free.”

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