



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

January 2014

Human trafficking. It's a term most people associate with a distant country, but the unfortunate reality is that this form of modern day slavery is happening right here in our community. As your district attorney, I want to raise awareness of this "hidden" crime.

Not to be confused with human smuggling—a form of illegal migration involving the transport of a person across an international border, usually in exchange for money—human trafficking is the use of force, fraud, or coercion to exploit someone for labor or commercial sex. (If the victims are minors, the elements of force, fraud, or coercion don't have to exist.)

Every day all over America, men, women and children are being trafficked. In fact, trafficking in persons is now second only to drugs as a means of income for criminal street gangs.

And while California is among the top three states in the nation for human trafficking, it often goes unnoticed. When people witness a robbery or shooting, they recognize it as a crime and call 911. But human trafficking plays out quietly right under our noses, in a few typical scenarios.

In a classic labor trafficking case, a young man from another country is promised a job in California. He is told he'll make \$8 an hour in construction, work a 40-hour work week and be placed in housing. Instead, upon his arrival, his passport and ID are seized. He is forced to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week. His housing consists of a one-room shack, where he sleeps with six other men, also being exploited, on thin mattresses on the floor. His traffickers withhold wages, claiming he owes them for the cost of bringing him to America. He earns the equivalent of \$3 an hour, sending what he doesn't spend on food and necessities back to his family in his home country. He is told that if he tells anyone, his family will be killed.

Teenage girls are frequent targets in typical sex trafficking cases. These girls are often at-risk already victims of sexual or physical abuse, or perhaps runaways. Adept at singling out a vulnerable girl, the trafficker tells her what she longs to hear—that he'll be her boyfriend, show her what it's like to be treated right. She'll jump into the relationship and, at first, will experience everything he promises. He'll buy her clothes, makeup and jewelry. But after a few weeks, he'll tell her he

needs her to do something for him: he wants her to have sex with other men for money. She reluctantly complies, wanting to assure him that she loves him. After a few nights of selling herself, she wants to quit. When she tells her trafficker she is leaving, he brutally beats her. He tells her that if she leaves, he'll post the nude pictures he's taken of her on Facebook. And he'll beat her up again if she doesn't continue selling herself.

If this sounds like something that doesn't happen here, think again. There have been two recent cases of sex trafficking in Tulare County. In both cases, the traffickers were men who recruited teenagers to perform sex acts. Both have pled guilty. But we know that more human trafficking exists in our backyard, and we need to do two things to uncover these cases.

The first is to encourage training for law enforcement. In light of this, my office is partnering with Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux to ensure that local law enforcement officers recognize human trafficking when they encounter it. We are in talks to provide training that we hope officers from every law enforcement agency in Tulare County will attend.

The second is public education. Armed with knowledge of human trafficking, our citizens can more easily recognize and report human trafficking. My office recently convened a human trafficking committee, with a focus on raising awareness of this crime. A public service announcement campaign, including radio and print ads, has been running throughout the month of January.

Everyone can do his or her part. Keep your eyes open for signs of human trafficking, and if you suspect it's occurring, don't be afraid to get involved. Call your local law enforcement agency, or the national hotline at 1-888-3737-888. Be a hero to someone who is too frightened to speak out. Working together, we can eliminate this horrible crime in our community.

Tim Ward
District Attorney

POLARIS PROJECT

To learn more about human trafficking, call our Victim Witness Assistance Division at 636-5471, or visit **www.polarisproject.org**.