



Doctors for Change 2019 Policy Priorities

Improve Anti-Human Trafficking Policy

ABOUT DOCTORS FOR CHANGE

Doctors for Change is a member-based organization with over 1,500 participating health care providers, students, and medical residents throughout the Houston region. Our members, Board of Directors, and Leadership Team donate countless hours to make our organization run. The Board and Leadership team work closely with committees and our staff members to accomplish all of the work that we do. Doctors for Change works to increase access to care and improve the health of all Houstonians and all Texans through research, education, collaboration, and advocacy.

WHY ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking (HT) is modern-day slavery, and Texas is a hub for both international and domestic human trafficking. Texas is leading the nation in enacting policies to make it easier to go after the predators who are enslaving and exploiting our children. Now it is time for Texas to strengthen policies to 1) establish interventions that will result in primary prevention of trafficking, and 2) better help the victims of this heinous crime.

DFC has a very active Anti-Human Trafficking Committee. Over the past twelve years, we have provided education to thousands of health care providers on identifying human trafficking victims. The goal of this education is to identify victims who present to medical care – so that these victims can escape their traffickers and receive the physical and mental health care they need. Between 50-80% of human trafficking victims are seen by health care providers during their captivity. Delay in health care can lead to relapse. Current time to appropriate subspecialty care can be **2-3 months**.



TO IMPROVE ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING POLICY IN TEXAS, WE RECOMMEND

1. Implement primary prevention strategies in high risk youth including interventions in the foster care system.

The child welfare system plays a critical role in protecting children whose parents are unable to take care of them. While foster care placements are intended to be safe, 86% of runaway children lured into commercial sexual exploitation are from the child welfare system. Risk factors for commercial sexual exploitation include past sexual abuse by someone in the home, parental neglect or abandonment, homelessness following running away or being kicked out of the home, or homelessness following aging out of foster care. In any given year in Texas, the 24,097 children involved with child welfare services are considered at high-risk of being trafficked. Traffickers often target foster care group homes and youth homeless shelters knowing that these children have limited social and financial support, as well as traumatic experiences that can distort what they believe they can expect and deserve from the people in their lives. Traffickers often engage in a variety of tactics to establish power and control over their victims. Tactics include establishing an intimate relationship that evolves to manipulation, control and violence, forced coercion with drugs or alcohol, violence and threats to cultivate fear, grooming through online social networks, and leveraging current victims to convince their peers to become involved.

Across the last decade, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services has been under intense scrutiny and criticism for lapses in ensuring child safety within the foster care system. During the 85th legislative session, 88 bills were introduced to legislature to address foster care system reform. Twenty-one of those bills passed and were enacted into law. While this represents a critical step forward in foster care system reform, work remains to be done to produce meaningful change and support for our most vulnerable children.

We therefore recommend:

- Fully fund the foster care system.
 - Dedicate additional funding to hire more caseworkers and improve recordkeeping.
 - Provide semiannual trafficking training for all caseworkers and foster families.
 - Support innovations within the foster care system ameliorate the risk factors for trafficking.
- Develop a Texas Runaway Intervention Project – similar to what has been done in other states. In 2006, Minnesota passed the Safe Harbor for Youth Act, which detailed three key components for a statewide primary intervention model. First, the act called for a systematic identification of adolescents who are at risk for, or are currently, commercially sexually exploited. After identification, they screen and refer at-risk youth to appropriate programs. Each individual identified is assigned to a certain program based on the associated level of risk.
 - Minnesota’s Runaway Intervention Project (RIP) is a program that includes these key components and has been well studied. RIP is a program designed to



specifically help girls aged 15 years or younger who are at risk for or who have experienced sexual exploitation in Minnesota [9]. The purpose of the program is to intervene with potential runaways who are at risk and to try to stabilize them within their family of origin, if possible. The first component involves screening and referrals from the community that allow workers to identify the appropriate level of individual risk of each girl. RIP referrals generally include runaways with significant truancy from school who have not been commercially sexually exploited. The second component is a referral to the County Attorney's Truancy Intervention Project (TIP). TIP is a program that accepts girls who are at low or moderate risk for sexual exploitation. If the screening by RIP is positive for the child to be in this category, RIP refers the girl to TIP to improve the child's school attendance and family connectedness. The third component of the RIP intervenes for girls identified as moderate risk for sexual exploitation, running away, or any other risky behaviors. These girls are referred to the Sexual Offense Services (SOS) in Minnesota which provides empowerment support groups. The last component of the RIP refers girls who are at the highest risk of sexual exploitation and running away or have already experienced sexual exploitation to the MidWest Children's Resource Center (MCRC) which provides intensive intervention services.

- This program has a 96.7% overall effectiveness rate in intervening and preventing sexual exploitation with a net return of \$28.9 million in value to the public budget per year of intervention. A 2016 study by the University of Texas at Austin found that in Texas's current climate of sex trafficking, an estimated \$6.5 billion is spent on the lifetime costs of providing care to the survivors of sex trafficking. The cost of implementing a runaway intervention program in Texas to prevent trafficking before it happens certainly pales in comparison to the immense cost of providing for victims once the damage is already done.
- Prevent child abuse in Texas. There are evidence-based means of systematically decreasing child abuse. One such intervention is improving access to evidence-based parenting education. We also support a statewide effort to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that increase the risk of trafficking during adolescence.
- Educate teachers, school leaders, and students (at a developmentally appropriate level) regarding safe relationships and trafficking.

Pertinent legislation:

- HB 45 (Minjarez): Relating to creating a mentor program for foster youth. **Left pending in Human Services committee 2/19.** A workgroup formed by the Legislature during the last session recommended the use of a peer support model to further enhance support for older youth.
- HB 403 (Thompson, Senfronia): Relating to training requirements for a member of the board of trustees and the superintendent of an independent school district regarding sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other maltreatment of children. **Out of the House and referred to Education on 4/1.**
- SB 458 (Huffman): Relating to training requirements for a member of the board of trustees and the superintendent of an independent school district regarding sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other maltreatment of children. **Left pending in Education committee 3/19.**
- HB 507 (White): Relating to a task force to coordinate and make recommendations on parent engagement and education programs provided by state agencies. **Considered in Calendars on 4/5.**
- HB 822 (Parker): Relating to addressing adverse childhood experiences and developing a strategic plan to address those experiences. Referred to Public Health 2/25. Using a public health framework, the bill directs state agencies to collaboratively analyze data, identify effective strategies to prevent and treat ACEs using existing programs, and recommend additional supports as needed, among other actions.
- SB 1353 (Powell): Relating to addressing adverse childhood experiences and developing a strategic plan to address those experiences. Referred to Health and Human Services 3/7.
- HB 1509 (Calanni): Relating to consent instruction and instruction on the prevention of sexual abuse and sex trafficking for certain public school students. Referred to Public Education 3/4.
- HB 4263 (Klick): Relating to developing a strategic plan to ensure the provision of prevention and early intervention services complies with federal law. Referred to Human Services on 3/25.
- SB 355 (West): Relating to developing a strategic plan to ensure the provision of prevention and early intervention services complies with federal law. Left pending in Health & Human Services committee on 3/5. This bill directs the Department of Family and Protective Services to develop a strategic plan to leverage new opportunities to use federal funding to prevent child abuse and neglect and keep more children safely with their families in compliance with the Family First Prevention Services Act.



2. Improve healthcare access and funding for human trafficking victims by establishing a medical home. We would also like to see a requirement that all airlines, hotel companies, and hospitals that operate in Texas develop internal protocols for addressing anti-human trafficking incidences, as well as, annual staff trainings to recognize signs of human trafficking.

Pertinent legislation:

- HB 1113 (Davis, Sarah): Relating to state contract limitations and programs for sex trafficking prevention and victim treatment. **Scheduled for public hearing on 4/10.**

3. Continue to fund and enhance the various state-led coalitions, task forces, and working groups that sustain adequate public awareness campaigns.

Pertinent legislation:

- HB 1232 (Guillen): Relating to the establishment and duties of the human trafficking prevention coordinating council. **Reported favorably as substituted 4/4.**
- SB 72 (Nelson): Relating to the establishment and duties of the human trafficking prevention coordinating council. **Out of the Senate and referred to State Affairs on 4/1.**