

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 13, 2023

1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Sarah Vance, Chair
Representative Jamie Allard, Vice Chair
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative David Eastman
Representative Andrew Gray
Representative Cliff Groh

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON HUMAN & SEX TRAFFICKING/2022
REPORT BY DPS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

TONY WEGRZYN, Lieutenant; Deputy Commander
Division of Alaska State Troopers;
Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit
Department of Public Safety
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint presentation, titled
"Department of Public Safety Human and Sex Trafficking
Enforcement."

KATIE TEPAS, Staff; Program Coordinator
Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking;
Division of Alaska State Troopers
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking."

BRENDA STANFILL, Vice Chair
Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:00:12 PM](#)

CHAIR SARAH VANCE called the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Representatives Gray and Vance were present at the call to order. Representatives C. Johnson, Groh, Allard, Eastman, and Carpenter arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**OVERVIEW: Governor's Council on Human & Sex Trafficking/2022
Report by DPS**

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CHAIR VANCE announced that the only order of business would be an overview on the governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking and the 2022 report by the Department of Public Safety.

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TONY WEGRZYN, Lieutenant, Deputy Commander, Division of Alaska State Troopers, Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit, Department of Public Safety (DPS), provided a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Department of Public Safety Human and Sex Trafficking Enforcement" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He gave a brief review of the work he has done for DPS. He moved to slide 2 which quoted DPS's deputy commissioner, and he reiterated that prostitution is intertwined with drug trafficking and other violent crimes. He showed slide 3, which addressed the reasons sex trafficking exists in Alaska. He pointed out that this includes a low risk and high reward component. He added that these cases are very complex to investigate, and this is attributed to the different crimes intertwined with prostitution. He continued explaining the reasons that sex trafficking exists in Alaska, which also include the demand, vulnerabilities in the state's population,

and gaps in services for victims. He also referenced the money that an individual could make from prostitution, quoting prices found last week from active Anchorage advertisements. He compared these prices with that of trafficking illegal drugs. He noted that versus the drug trade, the victims of sex trafficking are often "recycled" and used again.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN discussed locations where sex trafficking is found, as seen on slide 4, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Primarily internet based

- Sex trafficking victims are working less on the streets
- Online sites have become the primary method of advertising
- Adultlook
- Skip The Games
- Megapersonals
- Not as many ads, but the numbers are rising for:
 - OneBackPage
 - Adult Search
 - USA sexguide

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN stated that it is a wide misconception that prostitution involves consenting adults. He noted that there are many ways that consenting adults have consensual sex without exchanging money. He reiterated that the use of money incentivizes sex trafficking, and he highlighted that it is used as a recruitment tool.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN noted that slide 5 and slide 6 had already been reviewed for the committee; therefore, he briefly summarized the topics.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN reviewed the statutes on slide 7. He pointed out that deterrence is the key in all criminal behavior. He outlined that the chance of getting caught and consequences severe enough to teach a criminal are the two components of deterrence.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN reviewed a 2014 investigation, known as "Alaska Naughty Maids," as seen on slide 8. He stated that this

was one of the first Special Crimes Investigative Unit's (SCIU's) investigation of this type. He stated that women were marketed on the website across the state, and the main suspect was convicted of sex trafficking in the second degree in 2015. On slide 9, he recounted a 2016 murder of a 16-year-old boy, who was shot by a gun stolen from a patron of prostitution. He noted that patrons will often bring a gun to the scene, as they know they could be assaulted. He noted an error on the slide, as the conviction had been manslaughter.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN examined the real-life risks to patrons and sex workers on slide 10, and he explained Class A Misdemeanors and Class B Misdemeanors.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN discussed recent trooper cases, as seen on slide 11. He discussed a demand reduction operation which had targeted patrons. A fake advertisement had been posted, which resulted in 250 responses in 24 hours. He stated that many of these responses were sex traffickers offering the prostitute incentives to come work for them. He noted that this is considered a recruitment tool for sex traffickers.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN discussed the demand for prostitution, as seen on slide 12, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- The reason traffickers traffic their victims is MONEY
- Patrons are the funding source for traffickers
- Conducted numerous interviews with patrons: not one has considered the person they are set to meet could be being forced to have sex
- Nearly all of the patrons considered they could be robbed during the event and took countermeasures to reduce the chances: armed, wanted to meet in a public place, etc.
- Demand reduction ads:
 - Young adult fictitious female
 - 200 unique phone numbers wishing to meet
 - 54 numbers soliciting account for sex - after only 18 hours

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN, on slide 13, highlighted another demand reduction operation in 2022, where 22 patrons were contacted, all agreeing to trade sex for money. He stated that all were charged under AS 11.66.100(a)(2), a class B misdemeanor that prohibits payment for sexual conduct. Moving to slide 14, he outlined the trooper criminal cases and arrestees, as seen on the graphs.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN noted his technique of portraying a patron to gather information on sex workers. He continued discussing techniques for information gathering and interviewing, as seen on slide 15. He noted that sex workers almost always have experienced sexual and physical assault, almost always have known other women who are being trafficked, and almost never report their own trafficking.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN moved to slide 16 concerning recruitment methods for victims, and he reiterated that sex traffickers will search common sex-for-money advertising websites to recruit potential victims. He added that controlled substances can be used as a recruiting tool, or at a minimum, a tool to coerce the victim to perform. He concluded drug trafficking and sex trafficking commonly overlap, as addiction is often used as a tool to control the prostitute.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN discussed exploiting vulnerabilities on slide 17. He stated that traffickers often profit from finding and recruiting people to exploit. They do this by identifying their victims' vulnerabilities, which is often through drug addiction. He listed other needs that the traffickers may target, such as child care, education, food, and housing.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN listed characteristics that traffickers tend to target on slide 18, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Low self-esteem
- Drug or alcohol use/addiction
- Relationship issues (e.g. domestic violence)
- Family issues
- Someone seeking to leave current situation
- Prior victimization (as a child or adult)
- Mental health issues
- Naiveté or innocence
- Particular cultures or ethnicities

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN outlined a 2021 multistate investigation, as seen on slide 19. He continued to slide 20, which addressed how traffickers maintain control of victims, which involves the use of threats, violence, fear, or blackmail. He reiterated that traffickers would meet some of the most basic needs of victims, obtaining control over nearly every aspect of their lives, including drug addiction. On slide 21, he discussed how the sex traffickers' groom their victims. He stated that this involves targeting the victim, gaining their trust and information, fulfilling their needs, isolating them, and then abusing them.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN concluded on slide 22, which listed the needs of victims and survivors. The list includes protection, housing, clothing, transportation, child care, crisis intervention, mental health counseling, job training, substance abuse treatment, advocacy, legal services, education, medical services, and employment.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN, in response to a series of committee questions, stated that the data on the slide is statewide and this is related to existing statutes. Concerning why there are so few charges for prostitution, he answered that only patrons are charged. He stated that the focus is on the demand rather than the supply because of the discretionary objective. He stated that the effort to deter supply involves providing resources and assistance. He noted that charging the prostitute is seen as less beneficial in stopping trafficking.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN, in response to a committee question, expressed the belief that educating the state's youth should be a component. He expressed uncertainty concerning any information on specific programs, and he offered that there should be education on these risks. Concerning the age appropriateness for education, he recommended that if a person is old enough to have a smart phone, the person is old enough for the education.

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KATIE TEPAS, Staff, Program Coordinator, Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking, Division of Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety, in response to a follow-up question, answered that in the upcoming presentation the recommendations for education will be reviewed.

CHAIR VANCE said she has worked on awareness events. She discussed a parenting class for the digital age that was offered in Homer.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN, in response to a committee comment, pointed out the 90 charges for trafficking, as seen on slide 14. He estimated that there had been a larger amount of sexual assault charges during this time. In response to a follow-up question, he expressed the understanding that Alaska is number one in the nation in terms of sexual assault and child abuse. He added that he does not currently have this data available.

MS. TEPAS, concerning sexual assault rates, responded that the Alaska Victimization Survey has the best data available in the state. She stated that this is a prevalence study which indicates that Alaska has some of the highest rates in the nation. She noted that each state has different statutes, so the comparisons would not be "apples to apples." She further discussed these rates.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN, in response to a committee question, discussed the variety of reasons why the conviction rate seems low compared to the rate of charges. He added that the Department of Law would also have this data.

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LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN, in response to a committee question, affirmed that only Alaska State Trooper data has been represented. Concerning whether other police departments have units for these types of crimes, he shared his understanding that the state troopers are leading the charge in this arena. In response to a follow-up question concerning duplicative efforts in the state, he explained that most departments do not have the capacity for these units. He added that there is cooperation among departments.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY returned to slide 11, highlighting the large demands. He inquired about the legal alternatives to satisfying demand.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN responded that the demand for anonymous sex could be met with online dating apps. He pointed out that these would allow consenting adults to meet up without the exchange of money for the sex act.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY opined that there may be situations where an older man may not find a legal way to have his sexual needs met using the online dating apps and without exchanging money. He questioned whether there could be alternative legal options that would protect both the sex worker and patrons, and in turn disable traffickers.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN expressed the opinion that this is a philosophical debate, pointing out that Nevada already has a model for this; however, he opined that even though marijuana has been legalized, there is still a black-market trade.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN, in response to a follow-up question, confirmed that the path for a black market occurs when a legalized process takes place.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD pointed out that standing up an independent sex trafficking unit could curtail other crime. She questioned any recommendations.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN responded that every police department in Alaska would have to triple in size. He pointed out that resources are needed just to protect local citizens, stating that smaller departments would not be able to support the extra staff for this.

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REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN asked whether a black market did not exist before marijuana was legalized.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN explained that "the black market was just the market" before legalization of marijuana occurred. He explained that there would not be a black market for something that is already illegal.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN, referring to the example on slide 21, asked whether charges were brought against the sex trafficker who attempted to target and coerce the 17-year-old model.

LIEUTENANT WEGRZYN responded that this had allowed them to start an investigation, and the individual was charged for other sex trafficking crimes. In response to a follow-up question concerning grooming, he stated that there are laws against offering drugs to an underaged person. He expressed uncertainty concerning any charges that have occurred for grooming behavior.

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The committee took an at-ease from 2:14 p.m. to 2:16 p.m.

[2:16:55 PM](#)

BRENDA STANFILL, Vice Chair, Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking, co-presented the PowerPoint presentation, titled "Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking" [hard copy included in the committee packet].

MS. TEPAS co-presented the PowerPoint presentation, titled "Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking." On slide 2, she discussed the creation of the council by Administrative Order 328 [introduced during the Thirty-second Alaska State Legislature] and the resulting report [copy included in the committee packet]. She defined the duties of the council, as seen on slide 4 and slide 5. These include identifying the gaps in human trafficking information and providing various recommendations. She noted that for the purposes of the report and the presentation, the word "trafficking" will include sex, labor, and the commercial side of the sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).

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MS. TEPAS, on slide 6, noted that the council has identified 8 key priorities with 56 action steps and 6 subcommittees. She outlined key priority 1 on slide 7, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Statutory change to CDVSA's duties to include sex trafficking and funding for the Council and CDVSA

Addition of Departments of Labor and Family and Community Services

Addition of demand reduction to key duties

Inclusion of commercial sexual exploitation of children

Advance legislation

Enact statute that places the Council in the Department of Public Safety

MS. TEPAS introduced key priority 2, curriculum development and training, on slide 8. She deferred to Ms. Stanfill to present the recommendations.

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MS. STANFILL outlined the three recommendations related to key priority 2 on slide 8, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Work with a stakeholder group led by Department of Education to review existing trafficking prevention curricula

Develop e-learning module for educators

Incentivize and offer training for educators to use K-12 curricula (voluntary)

MS. TEPAS noted that Alaska has had success in raising the skills of educators in the areas of teen dating violence and sexual abuse of minors through Alaska's Safe Children's Act and taskforce. She stated that it is recommended that the taskforce's rigorous format for educator training be followed. She noted that the format has been evaluated for age appropriateness with its curriculum. She further discussed this curriculum and its evaluation, introducing key priority 3.

MS. STANFILL outlined the recommendations of key priority 3, as seen on slide 9, titled "Key Priority 3: Training to Identify and Respond to Trafficking," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Host a biennial statewide Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children symposium

Fund discipline specific training

Provide trauma 101 training for mental health providers and sponsor certification training for key treatment modalities

Offer specialized trafficking training similar to Sexual Assault Response Training

MS. TEPAS noted that, concerning this priority, the Anchorage Police Department and the Alaska Justice Center has received a federal grant to set up a unit. She stated that the unit would set up training for law enforcement and other entities. She noted that training has been occurring in the state already; however, she stressed that there is a need for additional training. She introduced key priority 4 concerning awareness campaigns.

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 10, titled "Key Priority 4: Public Awareness Campaigns" which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Create a working group to coordinate the development of messaging

Develop a multi-faceted campaign on all forms of trafficking

Translate materials into eight languages

Collect and compile data on trafficking in Alaska and make available

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MS. TEPAS introduced key priority 5, which involves housing insecurity for victims.

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 11 and discussed several models for creating safe and supportive housing. These include the Toronto model, SAFE-T model, and Maricopa model. She advised that a voucher program should be created in the state. She also advised that there should be increased connections between survivor serving organizations and grant programs.

MS. TEPAS added that the SAFE-T model stands for "survivor's assistance for escaping trafficking." She stated that this is

funded from a grant awarded to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation. She introduced key priority 6, which addresses that survivors need professional and peer support.

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 12, titled "Key Priority 6: Expand Services for Victims and Survivors," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Establish comprehensive and integrated wrap around on-site service centers

Establish a state hotline

Develop specialized services for youth victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children

Increase funded services to address primary needs

MS. TEPAS directed attention to slide 13, which listed needed services for victims and survivors. She moved to slide 14 and key priority 7, which is to establish demand reduction diversion programs. She highlighted the key recommendations.

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MS. TEPAS moved to slide 15 and stated that key priority 8 is to identify gaps in trafficking information. She addressed the lack of standardized screening tools, the discrepancy across sectors as to how trafficking is defined, the limited data on labor trafficking, and the fact sex trafficking is not a sex crime under AS 11.41; therefore, data across all police agencies is not available in the DPS Felony Sex Offense Report

MS. TEPAS referred to slide 16 and outlined recommended actions, which includes the development of screening tools for commercial sexual exploitation of children, compiling existing data sets and definitions into one location, and adding trafficking questions to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Study. Summarizing the presentation, she moved to slide 17 and slide 18.

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REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN recalled that Ms. Stanfill had mentioned a desire to bring in stakeholders to form a more collaborative process. He asked for clarification of the meaning of "stakeholders."

MS. STANFILL responded that stakeholders would not include the patrons.

CHAIR VANCE thanked the presenters.

[2:56:45 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:56 p.m.