

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 26, 2024

1:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Sarah Vance, Chair
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Andrew Gray
Representative Cliff Groh

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Jamie Allard, Vice Chair
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative Jesse Sumner

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Justin Ruffridge

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): HUMAN AND SEX TRAFFICKING AWARENESS WEEK

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JOSH LOUWERSE, Director of Statewide Initiatives
Covenant House Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a PowerPoint, entitled "Justice in Human Trafficking Week," during the presentation on Human and Sex Trafficking Awareness Week.

ANNA TAYLOR, Supervising Attorney
Alaska Institute for Justice
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint, entitled "Labor Trafficking," during the presentation on Human and Sex Trafficking Awareness Week.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:02:37 PM](#)

CHAIR VANCE called the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives C. Johnson, Gray, Groh, and Vance were present at the call to order. Also present was Representative Ruffridge.

PRESENTATION(S): Human and Sex Trafficking Awareness Week

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CHAIR VANCE announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on Human and Sex Trafficking Awareness Week.

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JOSH LOUWERSE, Director of Statewide Initiatives, Covenant House Alaska, provided a PowerPoint, entitled "Justice in Human Trafficking Week" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He said trafficking vulnerabilities include inadequate social safety nets; insufficient state statutes; cumbersome anti-trafficking funding; the influx of fentanyl; a lack of community understanding; and victims feeling unsafe to come forward. Areas of homelessness continued to be a recruitment ground for traffickers.

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MR. LOUWERSE, in response to a committee question, answered yes, the movement of drugs was a key piece to both labor and sex trafficking.

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MR. LOUWERSE resumed the presentation with trafficking prevention tips. He suggested that taking a holistic look at how Alaskans live and removing some of the day-to-day pressure could help. Systematic training of law enforcement was another suggestion. The FY 23 Covenant House Alaska trafficking data identified three common risk factors: less than one permanent connection; suffered from disorders; and an income of less than \$1,341. 57 percent of the tracking victims identified by the organization showed two or more risk factors. Covenant House Alaska offered numerous legislative recommendations, including

the passage of comprehensive "Safe Harbor" laws; providing special protections to minors; allowing vacatur of convictions for those found guilty of crimes committed while being trafficked; removing the defense that allows traffickers to claim they did not know a minor victim's age; impounding vehicles used in the act of buying sex; publicly reporting those who are convicted of buying sex; and mandatory trafficking education for "Johns." Mr. Louwerse concluded the presentation by highlighting all trafficking-related legislation, including HB 254, HB 259, HB 265, HB 265, HB 67/SB 65, HB 235, and HB 234.

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MR. LOUWERSE, in response to committee questions, explained that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, and queer (LGBTQ) youth were disproportionately homeless and more vulnerable to trafficking due to a lacking support system; Covenant House Alaska's shelter served 250-300 young people per year, and with its expanded housing opportunities, 1,000 kids collectively.

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The committee took an at-ease from 1:38 p.m. to 1:41 p.m.

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ANNA TAYLOR, Supervising Attorney, Alaska Institute for Justice (AIJ), presented a PowerPoint, entitled "Labor Trafficking" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. The AIJ, a non-profit, was founded in 2005 to protect the human rights of all Alaskans through legal services, policy, and education. The AIJ has three components: Alaska Immigration Justice Project (AIJP), the Language Interpreter Center (LIC), and research and policy. Between July 1, 2022, and July 1, 2023, the AIJ served 72 survivors of labor trafficking, 8 survivors of sex trafficking, and 17 survivors of both. 40 survivors were not fluent in the English language. She explained that human traffickers capitalize on their victims' vulnerabilities, such as immigration status, substance abuse, or past criminal convictions, to maintain control. In terms of immigration status, undocumented immigrants were the most vulnerable to victimization out of fear of deportation and basic survival; however, those with non-immigrant visa status or lawful permanent residents were also at risk.

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MS TAYLOR, in response to a committee question, confirmed that there was a "crackdown" on identification requirements after [the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001]. She further discussed the barriers created by not having proper identification.

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MS. TAYLOR continued the presentation by discussing immigration and labor trafficking. A class action lawsuit was brought against North Pacific Seafoods by 800-1,000 plaintiffs - many from Mexico and Central America - that alleged wage violations and exploitative labor practices. She said labor trafficking was about forcing someone to do work and required force, fraud, and coercion. The A-M-P Model involved the identification of action, means, and purpose to recognize trafficking. Ms. Taylor shared several examples of how the A-M-P model was used to identify trafficking in various scenarios based on real world examples. The four-year T Visa was available for victims of severe human trafficking to provide security and safety for survivors who have not unwillingly refused to help in the investigation of human trafficking. U Visas and VAWA Self-Petitions were also available for human trafficking survivors.

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MS. TAYLOR, in response to committee questions, identified the agriculture industry, the construction industry, and fish processing plants as areas of concern, as well as any situation in which an employee lives with his/her employer; "severe" human sex trafficking was defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA); U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services decided whether a case was extreme enough.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:24 p.m.