

NEWS RELEASE

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AG STRANGE, U.S. ATTORNEY BECK JOIN FOR GREATER AWARENESS AND HELP TO VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

(MONTGOMERY)--Attorney General Luther Strange and U.S. Attorney George L. Beck, Jr., joined with members of the Human Trafficking Coalition for the Middle District of Alabama at a news conference today to highlight January as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

"We stand together to shine the light of public awareness, bringing the tools of law enforcement and community services to expose an ugly crime and to help its victims," said Attorney General Strange. "The great tragedy is while human trafficking is a pervasive and fast-growing crime, it is often undetected. Victims may go unrecognized and not even realize that what is being done to them is illegal or that they can ever escape. Victims are isolated from those who might help them, and trapped in a terrifying web of violence, intimidation and control. With the coordinated effort of those here today and many others, we are working to break that web and to free its victims."

U.S. Attorney Beck stated, "Many victims hide in fright in our own backyard in nightmare conditions and forced prostitution. I want to thank law enforcement in the Middle District, and especially the Human Trafficking Coalition, for their devotion to finding and freeing victims of human trafficking. Make no mistake, human trafficking is enslaving our fellow Americans, many of whom are children of broken homes or runaways, targeted to serve in the commercial sex trade. This office will prosecute traffickers and protect victims. I encourage everyone to visit DOJ's website at www.ovc.ncjrs.gov or the HHS website at www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking to learn more about human trafficking. Let's work together to fight and prevent this evil criminal conduct."

Attorney General Strange warned potential offenders that first-degree human trafficking is a Class A felony punishable by 10 years to life imprisonment, and that second-degree human trafficking is a class B felony, punishable by two to 20 years imprisonment. It also is a crime to obstruct or attempt to interfere or prevent enforcement of Alabama's human trafficking law, Act 2010-705. Alabama's law was recently used in successful prosecutions by the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office.

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Attorney General Strange thanked Representative Jack Williams of Birmingham for his sponsorship of the bill that became Alabama's human trafficking law. Representative Williams stated that, "The Human Trafficking Act of 2010 helped to make Alabama a safer place for its most vulnerable and a harsher place for those who peddle human misery." Related legislation is being introduced in the upcoming session by Senator Dick Brewbaker. Senate bill 50 would promote awareness and facilitate assistance to trafficking victims by requiring that the national hotline number be displayed in certain establishments and published on certain internet sites.

State law provides for prosecution of human trafficking in the forms of forced labor or sexual servitude through coercion or deception. Minors are not legally able to consent to being used for sexual servitude, and the offender's supposed ignorance of the victim's age is not a defense.

Federal law provides for prosecution of human trafficking in essentially the same two forms, labor trafficking or sex trafficking. Both forms of trafficking require proof of force, fraud, or coercion. Federal law, however, does not require the presence of force, fraud, or coercion where a minor child is being trafficked. The penalties under federal law also differ somewhat. Labor trafficking is punishable by no more than 20 years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and restitution. The term of imprisonment can increase under limited circumstances. Sex trafficking of a minor is punishable by no less than 10 years to life imprisonment, a fine, and mandatory restitution. If the victim of sex trafficking is an adult or a minor who was subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, the offense is punishable by no less than 15 years imprisonment to life, a fine, and mandatory imprisonment.

Human trafficking is recognized as "a modern-day form of slavery" and "is tied with the illegal arms industry as the second largest criminal industry in the world today," according to a fact sheet distributed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The information from HHS estimates that approximately 600,000 to 800,000 victims annually are trafficked across international borders worldwide, and that victims are generally trafficked into the U.S. from Asia, Central and South America, and Eastern Europe. The situations of many victims are complicated by an inability to speak English that isolates them further from those who might recognize and help them.

Trafficking involves not only victims who are forced to work in prostitution and engage in other kinds of sex trade, but also can include victims in situations such as domestic servitude, sweatshop factories or migrant agricultural work. HHS notes ways in which traffickers use force, fraud and coercion to control and exploit their victims. Forceful violence may include beatings and rape, and intensive deprivation of nourishment and sleep may also be used to break down the resistance of victims. Fraud may involve false or misleading offers of employment, with victims then forced into prostitution. It may lead to debt bondage, with the victim forced to pay exorbitant fees for travel, food and housing, being kept isolated and in horrendous living circumstances with a growing debt that is impossible for them to ever pay. Coercion is

the use of intimidation, restraint, and threats of serious harm to victims or their families or loved ones. Traffickers often take and withhold travel papers and documentation, to maintain control and make escape more difficult.

The Human Trafficking Coalition cites its mission as “To Find and Free” victims. The coalition began its work in late 2009, initiated and organized by Assistant U.S. Attorney Monica Stump of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Alabama. The coalition draws together representatives of law enforcement, government agencies and social service providers to promote awareness and recognition of victims and to find and provide resources to help them. This includes activities such as networking with education and health care professionals about how to identify and build relationships of trust so that victims may be rescued.

Human Trafficking has been a particular concern of the National Association of Attorneys General, selected by NAAG President and Washington Attorney General Rob McKenna last year as for an initiative entitled “Pillars of Hope: Attorneys General Unite Against Human Trafficking. In August of 2011, Attorney General Strange joined 44 other Attorneys General in a letter calling on Backpage.com to remove sex trade advertising and to demonstrate policies and actions taken to prevent the use of its advertising to promote or facilitate human trafficking. A similar effort by 42 Attorneys General in 2008 ultimately led to Craigslist removing its section for “erotic services.”

Attorney General Strange and U.S. Attorney Beck urged citizens to be alert and to report any concerns or suspicions to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center by calling its toll-free hotline, 1-888-373-7888.