

Cast

COALITION TO
ABOLISH SLAVERY
& TRAFFICKING

Emergency Funding for California's Trafficking Victims in the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis

A REQUEST FOR 10 MILLION IN ONE-TIME FUNDING TO ADDRESS THE
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS



**#STOP
TRAFFICKING
IN ITS TRACKS**

Cast
COALITION TO ABOLISH
SLAVERY & TRAFFICKING

PROPOSAL FOR 10 MILLION IN ONE –TIME ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR DIRECT TRAFFICKING VICTIM SERVICES

I. Impact of COVID-19 on Human Trafficking in California

Human trafficking, whether for sexual or labor exploitation, is already difficult to combat in “normal” times. Within the United States, **human trafficking has had a particularly dramatic impact on the state of California.** Even without the heightened threat of the novel coronavirus (“COVID-19”), **California is particularly vulnerable to human trafficking** because of factors such as large runaway and homeless youth populations, proximity to international borders, the number of ports and airports, a significant immigrant population, and industries that attract forced labor and sex trafficking.¹ **The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the risks faced by this vulnerable group.** The widespread economic impact of job loss, unstable employment and potential risk of housing insecurity, coupled with the increased risk of victimization due to the pandemic, makes it essential for California to expend additional resources to prevent human trafficking and serve those who have been, and will be, victimized during COVID-19 and its aftermath. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has directly impacted funding for human trafficking service providers² and COVID-related measures like stay-at-home orders and travel restrictions have heightened the risk of trafficking exploitation.³ For individuals working in the “informal economy”⁴ who are often ineligible for unemployment assistance, income loss and layoffs can force them to turn to higher-risk employment situations to meet basic needs or avoid homelessness, which makes them vulnerable to trafficking.

Many trafficking victims are unable to access the healthcare and shelter needed to adequately protect themselves due to governmental and institutional measures taken to combat the spread of COVID-19.⁵ Lack of housing and loss of income can increase vulnerabilities both to re-trafficking and to COVID-19 infection. Specialized programs that offer direct assistance to help victims with accessing basic necessities like shelter and food are vital during the pandemic. Service providers in California consistently report wait lists for trafficking victim services and law enforcement partners struggle to find shelter for the victims they have identified. Staff at one California service provider reported that **the demand for food, shelter and other emergency assistance from May to July of 2020 was nearly doubled from 2019 levels.** Likewise, the Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (“CAST”) has seen a **455% increase in costs for providing basic necessities and housing during the pandemic** as compared to 2019.⁶ Funding the organizations that provide direct services to victims of human trafficking during the COVID-19 pandemic, including funding for critically needed direct support for housing and basic necessities, is essential to ensure victims are provided the immediate, trauma-informed services and direct support they need to help them escape their traffickers or not end up back with their trafficker.

¹ *What is Human Trafficking*, CALIFORNIANS AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, <http://www.caseact.org/learn/humantrafficking>.

² COVID-19 May Increase Human Trafficking in Vulnerable Communities, THE POLARIS PROJECT (April 7, 2020) <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2020/04/covid-19-may-increase-human-trafficking-in-vulnerable-communities/>.

³ *Impact Of The Covid-19 Pandemic On Trafficking In Persons*, UNITED NATIONS, OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME 2 https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf.

⁴ The term “informal economy” refers to economic activities that are not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements. This includes wage workers without social protection or other formal arrangements in both informal and formal sector enterprises, own-account workers such as street vendors and domestic workers. ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION 6 note 3 (April 7, 2020).

⁵ Corinne Redfern, *Anti-human trafficking organizations are struggling under COVID-19*, PBS (Aug. 3 2020) <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/anti-human-trafficking-organizations-are-struggling-under-covid-19>.

⁶ See Figure 1.

II. Emergency Funding Is Necessary to Directly Meet Needs Exacerbated by COVID-19

To meet the increased need for services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, an emergency funding source for direct services is required. **We therefore request that California lawmakers allocate one-time funding in the amount of \$10 million to permit service providers to better meet the unexpected direct support needs of trafficking victims during COVID-19 and its aftermath.** Targeted funding can make a significant difference in preventing the COVID-19 pandemic from turning into a human trafficking epidemic in California.⁷ This one-time funding will be administered by the Office of Emergency Services (“Cal-OES”) and distributed to the specialized victims’ service providers already providing comprehensive services to human trafficking victims in counties across the state. These organizations are best equipped to assist the most vulnerable individuals, address their critical needs and prevent clients from being re-trafficked. The \$10 million in funding would provide approximately \$500,000 to each provider for direct services to meet unexpected needs of current and future trafficking victim survivors identified in the aftermath of the pandemic. **Without funding for rent and other basic necessities, trafficking survivors may face increased vulnerability to re-trafficking or stay with traffickers longer.**

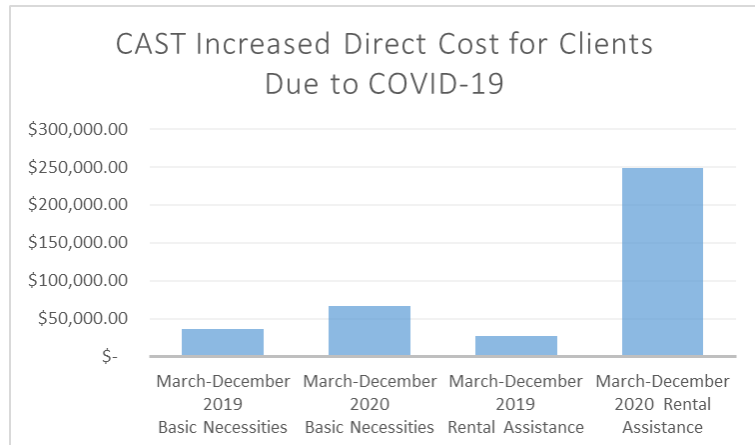
Programs and Counties that Will Receive the Additional Funding

Project Name	County	Assembly	Senate
Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting and Servicing Sexually Exploited Youth, Inc.	Alameda	18	9
Ruby’s Place	Alameda	20	10
Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission	Fresno	31	14
1736 Family Crisis Center	Los Angeles	53	24
The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST)*	Los Angeles	50	26
Journey Out	Los Angeles	46	18
Los Angeles - Volunteers of America	Los Angeles	53	24
Y.W.C.A. of Monterey County	Monterey	30	12
Community Service Programs, Inc.	Orange	69	34
Women’s Transitional Living Center	Orange	68	37
Stand Up Placer, Inc.	Placer	6	4
C.A.S.A. of Southwest Riverside County	Riverside	42	23
Opening Doors, Inc.	Sacramento	8	6
WEAVE, Inc.	Sacramento	7	6
Family Assistance Program	San Bernardino	33	21
North County Lifeline	San Diego	76	36
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach	San Francisco	17	11
Community Solutions for Children, Families, and Individuals	Santa Clara	30	17
Verity-Compassion. Safety. Support	Sonoma	2	2
Stanislaus Family Justice Center Foundation	Stanislaus	21	5
Interface Children Family Services	Ventura	44	19

⁷ COVID-19 May Increase Human Trafficking in Vulnerable Communities, THE POLARIS PROJECT (April 7, 2020) <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2020/04/covid-19-may-increase-human-trafficking-in-vulnerable-communities>.

a. Basic Needs and Rental Assistance

Human trafficking survivors, whether currently accessing services or seeking services for the first time, need even greater basic needs support and rental assistance during the pandemic. One service provider reported that the number of requests for food, housing and rental assistance received per week has nearly quadrupled due to COVID-19⁸, while another saw a 62% increase in requests for resources like housing and clothing.⁹ A third provider reported a 132% increase in requests for food and transportation.¹⁰ Covering the cost of necessities like rent, utility payments, credit check costs, furniture assistance for victims moving into permanent housing, and long term education costs will help victims become established and remain in a stable environment. Providing funding for items such as diapers, wipes, food cards, transportation (bus passes, taxi vouchers, etc.), WiFi access, and computer equipment for victims and their children who are distance learning will also help to address the immediate needs exacerbated by the pandemic.



b. Shelter Resources

Costs to secure a specialized shelter bed for an adult victim of human trafficking during COVID-19 are approximately \$38 a day, or \$13,870.00 annually.¹¹ Demand for shelter during the COVID-19 pandemic has outpaced California’s ready supply, which is even more limited due to social distancing and capacity restrictions. **Some shelters for trafficking survivors have had to close because of reported infections and others have partially suspended services due to government regulation or lack of funding.**¹² Providing victims with hotel vouchers is an alternative way to provide temporary housing for victims that have no other housing option. During the pandemic, service provider’s report their budgets have been significantly re-allocated to provide housing options such as hotels, and maintain other emergency housing options.¹³ This targeted funding will maximize victims’ access to shelter beds and also allowing better access to hotels and other shelter options for trafficking survivors when there is no available space at shelters.

III. Conclusion

Despite the devastating toll COVID-19 has taken on vulnerable communities, California now has an opportunity to establish and fund services that will allow these communities to recover in a more effective way. **In order for these crucial services to be accessible to trafficking victims experiencing**

⁸ Survey: Year End Impact of COVID-19 on Service Providers, CAST at 7.

⁹ *Id.* at 9.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 10.

¹¹ This figure is approximated from the data reported from Cal OES service providers and comparable costs associated with the cost of shelter beds coupled with supportive services for homeless persons and the experience of direct service providers for victims of human trafficking. See, e.g., *Costs Associated with First-Time Homelessness for Families and Individuals, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, OFFICE OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH (2010)*, https://www.huduser.gov/publications/pdf/costs_homeless.pdf (stating “In almost all cases, the costs associated with providing housing for individuals and families who are homeless within a program exceeds the Fair Market Rent cost of providing rental assistance without supportive services.”).

¹² Redfern, *supra* note 5.

¹³ Survey: Year End Impact of COVID-19 on Service Providers, CAST at 7.

the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, direct service providers across the State must be provided with additional emergency funding. Investing in direct resources will not only help current victims, but will mean better protection and support for trafficking survivors in the future.

Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) Contacts:

- Stephanie Richard, Policy & Legal Services Director, (213) 365-5249, Stephanie@castla.org
- Kay Buck, Executive Director (213) 365-0887, Kay@castla.org

COALITION TO ABOLISH SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING

Systemic change is at the core of CAST's mission. Taking a survivor-centered approach to ending human trafficking, CAST has a proven track record of working directly with survivors of human trafficking which builds an important bridge between practice and policy to inform effective policy initiatives. By developing broad-based partnerships, CAST effectively advocates for policies that work to end human trafficking and help survivors rebuild their lives.

Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST)

5042 Wilshire Blvd #586, L.A., CA 90036

(213) 365-1906

info@castla.org www.castla.org