

Cast

COALITION TO
ABOLISH SLAVERY
& TRAFFICKING

CALIFORNIA BUDGET & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS AT INCREASED RISK AMID CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC April 2020

“Traffickers commonly exploit sex and labor trafficking victims by providing access to shelter and basic necessities and making victims feel like they have nowhere to turn but the trafficker for support.

Further, traffickers prey on vulnerable populations such as the homeless, those fleeing abusive relationships, and immigrants through recruitment into what seems like legitimate employment but ends up being sex or labor trafficking.

California’s astronomical unemployment rate makes those seeking work even more vulnerable to trafficking.

Governor Newsom must act now to prevent human trafficking before it occurs and provide the resources necessary to those we know will be exploited during and after this crisis.”

- Senior Policy Advisor
Stephanie Richard, Cast

Governor Newsom acted swiftly to halt the spread of COVID-19 in California and recently allocated \$150 million in emergency funding to assist cities and counties in protecting the homeless populations in our state and allocated an additional \$42 million for at-risk youth, particularly focusing on foster children.

However, these narrowly-focused investments will not adequately protect all Californians who are at heightened risk for human trafficking abuse and mistreatment due to COVID-19. The Governor must take action now to better protect all of the truly vulnerable and invisible individuals in California, including undocumented immigrants, immigrants on temporary visas, unaccompanied immigrant children, those fleeing violence and abuse, and homeless youth and adults at greater risk for human trafficking during the pandemic.

While the world is essentially on hold due to the pandemic, sadly, human trafficking is not. In fact, we expect higher rates of trafficking, as we have seen before in the aftermath of natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and the 2010 Haiti earthquake. There we saw increased forced labor in construction, and we can expect to see the same in other essential industries in California, such as nursing, elder care and in our food supply chains. Further, increased rates of unemployment and shelter-in-place orders will cause trafficked victims to suffer abuse for a longer period of time, as they are now even more bound to their exploiters who commonly provide shelter and basic necessities.

Service providers across the state are already reporting that outreach prevention efforts, especially those in schools, have come to a halt. Providers are also reporting increased requests from current trafficking clients to meet basic needs, and increased costs to shelter programs having to quarantine new victims prior to entry. Not surprising are the reports of declining hotline calls compared to this time last year, indicating that fewer survivors are proactively seeking help. To prevent and provide essential services to those who will be exploited in the coming months and years after COVID-19 due to the increased vulnerabilities created by this pandemic, Cast urges Governor Newsom to take the following concrete steps as part of an augmented budget

or in the 2021 budget expected to be enacted in June.

\$30 Million Supplement for Human Trafficking Services & Prevention

- An additional **\$21 million** to current Cal-OES grantees providing services for human trafficking victims;
- **\$3 million** to launch a statewide hotline, technical assistance, and referral program for those seeking information and services and to report human trafficking abuse; and
- **\$6 million** for additional on the ground outreach and training to first responders across the state on identification and early prevention of human trafficking.
- Cast also supports the additional request for resources from key partners working with vulnerable populations in California including: the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence; the California Runaway and Homeless Youth Coalition; the California Immigrant Policy Center; and the California Child Welfare Director Association

Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) www.castla.org

Systemic change is at the core of CAST’s mission. Taking a survivor-centered approach to ending modern slavery, CAST has a proven track record of working directly with survivors of human trafficking which builds an important bridge between practice and policy. For policy questions please contact Stephanie Richard, Cast Senior Policy Advisor@Stephanie@castla.org

Key Areas Ripe For Trafficking Abuse:

- **Temporary Workers:** At this time, there could be as many as 150,000 immigrant workers on temporary work visas in California across various industries including hospitality, agriculture, construction, landscaping, domestic servants, elder care, and nursing-related employment. These workers will travel, live, and work in close quarters and their visas are dependent on their employer. Given the pandemic, employers may either have no work for these workers due to the closure of all but essential businesses in California or, alternatively, may need to place increased pressures on temporary workers who work in essential services supply chains.
 - **Protect temporary workers displaced from employment by layoffs and early termination of work, and provide assistance for these workers who are unable to return to their home countries.**
 - **Protect workers who are working in essential industries by providing access to health care, protective gear, and knowledge on where to turn if they are being exploited or trafficked.**
 - **Increase resources for specialized services for human trafficking of immigrant workers.**
 - **Update SB 477 to provide increased protections for all temporary workers in California.**
- **Homeless Youth and Adults:** Individuals experiencing homelessness are at high-risk of infectious diseases, and their lack of shelter and movement to different places create a higher risk for both contracting and spreading COVID-19. Additionally, increased unemployment and the difficulty of accessing support systems during the crisis could mean individuals experiencing homelessness are even more vulnerable to being recruited into trafficking.
 - **Increase resources for specialized services for human trafficking as well as the vulnerable homeless population.**
 - **Increase outreach and prevention efforts around human trafficking after the shelter-in-place rules are lifted by providing a statewide hotline and technical assistance support as well as training and outreach for wide range of first responders.**
- **Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Fleeing Violence¹:** The United Nations Secretary called for governments around the world to help address the “horrifying global surge in domestic violence” by making services for survivors a “key part of their national response plans for COVID-19.” The National Domestic Violence Hotline has reported contacts from victims saying their abusers are using COVID-19 as a reason to further isolate them from their friends and family. Some abusers are withholding financial resources or medical aid. Victims also face potentially dangerous situations by staying home in order to avoid infecting others. Those fleeing domestic violence and sexual assault are commonly at greater risk for recruitment into sex and labor trafficking and the rise in resources needed for domestic violence and sexual assault also, unfortunately, signals the need for increased specialized resources for human trafficking.
 - **Increase resources for specialized services for human trafficking as well as this vulnerable population.**
 - **Increase resources for child protective services as reports of child abuse and human trafficking are expected to increase.**
- **Recently Unemployed:** Recruitment into sex or labor trafficking to meet basic necessities or for access to shelter due to high unemployment rates in California and the country² could lead to an increase in trafficking. Additionally, trafficking both abroad and in the United States has been shown to increase in disaster areas or times of crisis—for example documented labor trafficking cases and abuse occurred in the construction industry in Texas, Florida, and Louisiana after hurricanes and floods.³ Additionally, in Haiti and Indonesia labor trafficking and domestic servitude cases increased after natural disasters.
 - **Increase resources for specializes services for human trafficking.**
 - **Increase outreach and prevention efforts after the shelter in place rules are lifted including a statewide hotline and technical assistance support as well as training and outreach for wide range of first responders.**
- **Factory Workers in CA and Abroad:** Increased surgeries and medical procedures, coupled with an aging population and increased infection control precautions, create demand for a variety of disposable products including garments, instruments, and monitoring equipment. Unfortunately, a 2018 report states that “surgical consumables are being produced with medieval labor conditions that would result in felony charges in the US.”⁴ As California seeks to replace and increase production of necessary medical equipment and supplies, the state must ensure protections are in place for workers producing these goods in local factories and that California is not willing to receive goods from other countries that were produced using trafficked workers.
 - **Ensure necessary goods produced by or procured for California are trafficking-free.**

¹ Melissa Godin. *TIME*. “As Cities Around the World Go on Lockdown, Victims of Domestic Violence Look for a Way Out” (March 18, 2020).

<https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>

² Heather Long. *The Washington Post*. “Over 10 Million Americans Applied for Unemployment Benefits in March as Economy Collapsed” (April 2, 2020).

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/02/jobless-march-coronavirus/>

³ <http://www.nolattrafficking.org/labor-trafficking>. Reporting the Signal International Case as one of the largest labor trafficking cases in the US which occurred after Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana coast and hundreds of Indian men paid \$10,000 to recruiters to travel to the gulf coast to work as welders and pipe fitters on damaged oil rigs, lured by the promise of permanent US residency; Million Express Manpower, Inc., a firm that after Hurricane Katrina recruited Thai workers by promising them agricultural jobs in North Carolina but instead routed them to New Orleans. Once in Louisiana, “they were forced to do construction work and held hostage by armed guards in squalid, un-rehabilitated buildings. Their passports and visas were confiscated. They were given no money for food, so they were forced to eat birds they caught outside their building.” See also <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2017/09/natural-disasters-and-the-increased-risk-for-human-trafficking/>; https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/rebuilding_after_katrina.pdf; Stout, Samantha, “Human Trafficking in the Wake of Natural Disasters: is the United States Any Different Than Third World Countries?” (2018). Accounting Undergraduate Honors Theses. <http://scholarworks.uark.edu/acctuh/2> reviewing data from both Hurricane Isaac in Louisiana and the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia and finding statistically significant at a 95% confidence level that there was a strong relationship between the changes in level of human trafficking and changes in wages, homelessness, and unemployment for Indonesia. For Hurricane Isaac, the P value was found to be .1047, which was statistically significant at a 90% confidence level.

⁴ Forced Labor in Surgical and Healthcare Supply Chains Simone Sandler, MBBS, MPH, Kristin Sonderman, MD, MPH, Isabelle Citron, BmBCh, MPH, Mahmood Bhutta, FRCS, DPhil, John G Meara, MD, FACS Journal of the American College of Surgeons (December 2018). [https://www.journalacs.org/article/S1072-7515\(18\)32082-9/abstract](https://www.journalacs.org/article/S1072-7515(18)32082-9/abstract)