

Dec. 1, 2025

Jessica Dimson
Director of Photography
New York Times Magazine
Via Email: jessica.dimson@nytimes.com

Dear Jessica Dimson,

As community-based organizations and advocates working every day to support survivors and address human trafficking in Los Angeles County and beyond, we were alarmed and disappointed by the images published alongside Emily Baumgaertner Nunn's recent *New York Times Magazine* story, "[Can Anyone Rescue the Trafficked Girls of L.A.'s Figueroa Street?](#)"

The photographs, including the lead image, show young people during moments of extreme vulnerability. The *Magazine's* reporting makes clear that some of these individuals may be minors, pictured during moments described as being chased down and handcuffed. Publishing images like these does not inform the public. It endangers the very people the story claims to care about.

Many of us work with survivors daily whose lives have been upended by violence, policing, and exploitation. Survivors need safety, dignity, and resources, not the global re-circulation and Internet enshrinement of these images.

Using identifiable images of young people who are being detained, pursued, or exploited, particularly when minors may be involved, is not responsible journalism or simply news reporting in the public interest. It is re-exploitation.

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics is explicit: journalists must "show compassion," "avoid pandering to lurid curiosity," and "balance the public's need for information against potential harm." These are the standards meant to prevent precisely this kind of harm.

These images fail that test. They retraumatize, they expose, and they contradict the stated purpose of the story. **As organizations and advocates working on the front lines supporting survivors, we can say unequivocally: these photos do real and lasting damage.**

We call on the *New York Times* to remove or replace any images that depict trafficked or exploited individuals in ways that compromise their safety or dignity. As one of the most influential news institutions in the world, the *Times* sets a precedent for how other outlets cover human trafficking. You have the responsibility and the power to model ethical reporting that does not sacrifice vulnerable young people for visual impact and website hits that support your advertising revenue and profit margin.

We also request clarity on how proof of age and consent were verified for the individuals photographed. Given that some youth on Figueroa may be involved in the foster care system or lack official documentation, the risk of publishing an image of a minor being exploited is substantial, and the ethical implications are profound.

Ultimately, our concern is not abstract or legalistic. It is the real harm caused when the media mirrors the dynamics of violence it claims to uncover. Survivors do not deserve a public display of their moments of vulnerability.

We recognize that no letter can speak on behalf of the individuals depicted. In an ethical system, survivors guide decisions about how they are portrayed and how their stories are told. Until that is the standard, we must collectively ensure that journalism does not reproduce the very harms it claims to expose.

We urge you to act quickly to correct this harm and uphold the ethical standards that should guide all reporting on human trafficking.

Signed,

Leigh LaChapelle

Associate Director, Survivor Advocacy, Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (Cast), in solidarity with the following undersigned organizations that work with survivors of trafficking:

Alia Azariah Survivor Consulting, artistsrevolt, Covenant House California, Deep Nepal, Freedom Network USA, HEAL Trafficking, Helen Stiver Consulting, National Survivor Network, Preble Street, Rise Above Justice Movement, San Francisco SafeHouse, SANE-SART, Sex Workers Outreach Project Los Angeles (SWOPLA), Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative, Loyola Law School, Survivor Alliance, Survivor Justice Center, Survivors 4 Justice Reform, Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC), The Human Trafficking Prevention Project, The Sidewalk Project, and WEAVE.

