



Defunding Survival to Fund War: How the Federal FY2027 Budget Proposal Endangers Survivors and Fuels Human Trafficking

On the United Nations' World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, Cast is calling attention to how the administration's budget priorities increase vulnerability to human trafficking on two fronts: at home, by cutting the safety net that protects people from exploitation, and abroad, by fueling the instability that allows trafficking to thrive.

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Human trafficking thrives where people have nowhere to turn. It takes root where poverty is deep, housing is insecure, health care is out of reach, and communities have been stripped of the resources they need to survive. As an organization that provides wraparound services to survivors of human trafficking, we see this reality every day and know what it means when those resources are threatened. Bottom line: Tax dollars should fund resources that prevent people from becoming exploited.

On April 3, 2026, the White House released its FY2027 budget proposal. It calls for cutting \$73 billion from non-defense discretionary spending (the programs that pay for housing, food, and health care) while boosting total military and defense funding to a record \$1.5 trillion, a 42% increase over the prior year. This is the largest military buildup in American history, paid for by cutting the programs people depend on to survive. This trade-off has a human cost, and we cannot let it go unnamed.

WHAT IS BEING CUT – AND WHY IT MATTERS

Each of the cuts below strips away a specific safeguard, the kind of stability that determines whether someone is protected from exploitation or exposed to it, and cuts off a survivor's path to safety.

Housing and basic needs: The proposal would eliminate the *Community Services Block Grant*, which currently helps more than 10 million people living in poverty. It would end the *Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program*, which helps families heat their homes in winter and cool them in summer. It would also cut new Section 8 housing vouchers, one of the most critical stabilizing resources available to the survivors we serve. Without stable housing, survivors lose the ground they need to leave or avoid an exploitative situation.

Food security: The *Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children* (WIC), which currently supports roughly 40 to 50 percent of all infants born in the United States and is strongly linked to improved birth and development outcomes, would be gutted. Monthly fruit and vegetable benefits for breastfeeding mothers would be slashed from \$52 to \$13. Benefits for young children would fall from \$26 to \$10. Food insecurity is one of the conditions traffickers are trained to look for and exploit.

Health and education: The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would lose roughly 40% of its funding. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) would be cut by \$6 billion. K-12 schools



would face \$8.5 billion in cuts. And Job Corps, which gives young people ages 16-24 a path to employment, would be eliminated entirely. Without health care, a stable school, or a path to a first job, young people lose the very options that keep them out of exploitative hands.

These are programs that provide food, shelter, health care, education, and economic opportunity, the very conditions that determine whether a person is safe or vulnerable. Cut them and you strip away the conditions that keep people safe from exploitation. Their absence is not incidental. It is the environment in which human trafficking thrives.

REAL SOLUTIONS REQUIRE INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE

At Cast, our work is grounded in a public health approach to human trafficking. We treat exploitation as a condition with social, economic, and structural root causes, not simply as a crime to be prosecuted. Prevention means addressing root causes before exploitation happens: making sure people have somewhere to live, something to eat, a doctor to see, a school that works, and a job to go to. Survivors need long-term, trauma-informed support that meets them where they are, not systems designed to surveil, detain, or deport them.

None of that is possible if the social infrastructure underlying it is dismantled. You cannot dismantle housing, food assistance, health care, and education, and then credibly claim to be fighting human trafficking. Prevention and intervention both require the same thing: a society that invests in people. This budget does the opposite.

MILITARIZATION MAKES HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORSE

That money doesn't disappear. It is being redirected into the military, one of the largest increases in military spending in U.S. history. Armed conflict and military buildup create the instability where trafficking thrives, displacing communities, collapsing local economies, separating families, and stripping away the protections marginalized communities already have too little of. At home, militarization looks like funneling resources into policing, immigration enforcement, and surveillance that come at the direct expense of the services that actually help people escape exploitation.

Cutting \$73 billion from the programs people depend on, while spending a record \$1.5 trillion on the military is a choice. And its consequences are predictable: more inequality, more vulnerability, more exploitation. This is a budget that endangers the people it should protect.

As an anti-trafficking organization working with survivors every day for over 27 years, we will not be silent. The people we serve deserve a society that invests in their housing, health, economic futures, and fundamental dignity, not one that trades their safety for military expansion.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

We are calling on Congress to reject this budget. Protect the programs that keep people safe. Fund housing, food, health care, education, and economic opportunity. Treat anti-trafficking work as the public health priority it is. And we're calling on you: contact your representatives. Share this statement. Stand with survivors. We will not accept a budget that trades the safety of the most vulnerable for military expansion.