

Legislation Text

File #: 240051, **Version:** 0

Recognizing January 2024 as Human Trafficking Prevention Month in the City of Philadelphia

WHEREAS, Human trafficking - the trade of human beings for the purpose of forced labor, sexual slavery, or involuntary prostitution - is a highly exploitative, deeply traumatizing, often violent practice endured by an estimated 27 million adults and children around the world and considered a violation of human rights by every international convention; and

WHEREAS, The hundreds of billions of dollars in estimated annual profit generated by human trafficking place it in third among illicit international business, behind only drugs and weapons, and some researchers believe it is the fastest-growing activity of transnational criminal organizations; and

WHEREAS, While traffickers exploit people with a wide range of vulnerabilities like poverty, legal status, or housing insecurity for a variety of reasons, including slave labor and prostitution, the psychological stress tactics they use - violence, threats, debt bondage, isolation, withholding of documents, false promises, and manipulation, often through drugs and alcohol - are remarkably similar, and combine to inflict complex, long-term trauma on victims; and

WHEREAS, In the United States, where the prevalent form of human trafficking is sex trafficking, it has been estimated by the Department of Health & Human Services that anywhere from 244,000 to 325,000 youth, mostly girls and/or members of racially, socially, and economically marginalized groups, are at risk for sexual exploitation in any given year, comprising up to a third of all victims; and

WHEREAS, At home and abroad, valiant efforts by NGOs, service providers, law enforcement agencies, and federal and state governments to assist current and former trafficking victims and prevent future trafficking have been underway for decades, with varying levels of success; and

WHEREAS, Barriers to the reduction or eradication of human trafficking include a lack of reliable statistics on phenomena taking place in the shadow economy, differences of opinion over what constitutes trafficking, and concerns about further victimization of traumatized people through law enforcement and the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, A more comprehensive data collection and analysis system would enable the Philadelphia Police Department and its federal and state law enforcement partners to better understand, confront, and prevent human trafficking in Philadelphia, and would go a long way toward more efficient allocation of resources to those most in need; and

WHEREAS, Notwithstanding these barriers, thousands of individuals across multiple sectors, including transportation, hospitality and healthcare, have been trained to recognize the common signs of human trafficking and reach out to those equipped to intervene in such matters; and

WHEREAS, Promising and effective local efforts, like the former WRAP (“Working to Restore Adolescents’

Power”) Court started by former Common Pleas Court and current Commonwealth Court Judge Lori Dumas in order to ensure that victims of trafficking are identified as such, and not further victimized by being charged with prostitution and related crimes, should be exported to other jurisdictions; and

WHEREAS, Other commendable local anti-trafficking work takes place under the auspices of the Philadelphia Anti-Trafficking Coalition, which is spearheaded by Covenant House and includes the Nationalities Service Center, the Salvation Army, Dawn’s Place, and Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church’s award-winning She’s My Sister Ministry, which was founded in 2011 by Dr. Ellyn Jo Waller, First Lady of the church and a longtime advocate for vulnerable and exploited women and girls of color; and

WHEREAS, In order to meet the most basic needs of people who have recently escaped trafficking, the Philadelphia Commission for Women and the Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence have partnered with Councilmember Ahmad on a personal care item collection drive; interested parties may drop off full-sized personal care items or underclothes at room 577 of City Hall or 1617 John F. Kennedy Boulevard, Suite 800 between now and January 31; and

WHEREAS, It is fitting that this Council take time during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month to acknowledge the many individual and institutional efforts to actively oppose, eliminate and prevent human trafficking and connect its victims with the broad scope of services necessary to begin healing from the trauma and harm it entails. now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA does hereby recognize January 2024 as Human Trafficking Prevention Month in the City of Philadelphia.