



Human trafficking

“Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity.” - Pope Francis

Each year, an estimated 17,000 vulnerable men, women and children are trafficked across our borders and then forced into slavery. Many are fleeing terrible situations in their home countries, and come to the United States to find a better life. Unfortunately, the nightmare often begins when they reach our shores.

Meanwhile, children and youth in out-of-home care, including, tragically, foster care and state-sanctioned institutions, are at a particularly high risk of being trafficked. While statistics in this area are difficult to confirm, several studies cite that 50 to more than 90 percent of children and youth victims of child sex trafficking had been involved with child welfare services.

Foreign-born child victims in the United States without the care of a parent or legal guardian are eligible to enter the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program, a specialized system of community-based and licensed foster-care programs developed and funded specifically for certain foreign-born children.

The URM programs operate under the principles of safety, permanency, and child well-being, coupled with the principles of integration and cultural competency.

For almost 35 years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) has coordinated a network of URM programs across the United States to provide care and custody for thousands of eligible children. This network includes services provided in Texas. A report published in 2015 by USCCB/MRS reveals that the overwhelming majority of the children entered the URM program as adolescents (ages 12-18) after they have been rescued or identified as victims of human trafficking.

Human trafficking takes many forms, and people can be exploited in nearly every industry. Generally, human trafficking cases are categorized according to the two types of exploitation noted in the federal law—sex and labor. In some cases, elements of both types may be present; for example, when sexual

acts are demanded from workers in addition to the labor or commercially related activities or when individuals performing legitimate commercial tasks are also compelled into commercial sex acts.

Children are exploited in a wide variety of industries and settings, including domestic servitude, retail personal care services (hair braiding), construction and manual labor, restaurant work, and agricultural processing. Some children are relatively isolated in people's homes while others are in contact with the general public in retail settings.

Legislation to restore the dignity of human trafficking victims, by sealing their court records if convicted of prostitution, or by improving identity protection of human trafficking victims, is supported by the Texas bishops. The bishops also support a proposed bill requiring that applicants for commercial truck licenses participate in a training class on recognition and reporting of human trafficking.

Where we stand

The TCCB has reviewed the following legislation for the 85th Texas Legislature:



HB 269 would allow individuals who have been convicted of prostitution to have their records sealed if a court finds that the person was a victim of human trafficking or compelled into prostitution. The TCCB supports this bill because it seeks to restore the dignity of human trafficking victims.



HB 272 requires that applicants for commercial truck licenses participate in a training class on recognition and reporting of human trafficking. The TCCB supports this bill to increase education to rescue victims of trafficking.



SB 256 improves identity protections for stalked and trafficked victims. The TCCB supports this bill to assist victims with recovery.



If victims of human trafficking are exploited in many settings, how can we help? Use these questions to evaluate if someone may be a victim of human trafficking:

- Can the person leave his/or her job or house when they want?
- Are there signs of physical abuse, such as bruises?
- Is the person being paid? How many hours does he/she work?
- Is the person or his/her family being threatened?
- Does he/she live with or near their employer? Does their employer provide housing? Are there locks on doors or windows from outside?

If you suspect someone is a victim of human trafficking:

- Ask the person if you can help them find a safe place to go immediately.
- If they need time, create an action plan with them to get to a safe place when they are ready.
- Call and make a report to the human trafficking hotline at 1.888.3737.888. The hotline has language capabilities, so any individual can call directly if they choose.