



Pennsylvania Anti-Human Trafficking Policy Forum Attendee Feedback Summary

Forum Overview:

Greenlight Operation, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Anti-Human Trafficking Caucus Chairman, Senator Dush, held 10 Anti-Human Trafficking Policy Forums across Pennsylvania from January - June 2026. All counties had representatives present at these forums. Over 240 individuals participated, and attendees included male and female survivors of labor and/or sex trafficking, law enforcement officials, social service providers, educators, lawmakers, and church leaders. A briefing on ethical survivor involvement, as outlined by the United Nations, was done at the beginning of each forum to honor and protect the lived-experience experts present. All forums lasted two hours. Consistent questions were asked at each forum, and attendees openly discussed concerns and solutions at-will. Additionally, 30 minutes was reserved in each forum to discuss concerns, barriers, and solutions the forum questions may not have tackled, which allowed each county to present additional anti-human trafficking priorities they desired to have on the record. The challenges and recommendations provided by attendees is outlined below.

IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Identified Challenge #1: Limited Resources and System Accountability

- Funding shortages, system silos, and overburdened service providers leave survivors without housing, transportation, and restorative services.
- Unreliable government funding and inaccessible federal victim services grants hamper service agencies from meeting caseload demands and engaging in multidisciplinary teams (MDT) and task forces.
- Prosecutors and investigators lack the time, finances, personnel, and equipment to tackle high caseloads and large geographic regions or participate in task forces. Where implemented, task forces struggle with collaboration and sustainability.
- Pennsylvania's human trafficking forfeiture law allocates only 30 percent of seized funds back to counties to investigate and prosecute cases or support victims.

- Agencies have limited access to relevant databases, coordination resources, and outcome measurement standards; Pennsylvania further has no centralized, multi-language victim resource center/hotline for reliable aid.
- ***Recommendations from forum participants: designated funding and accountable systems.***
 - Increasing federal, state, and county block grant funding for prevention, prosecution, investigation, MDTs, task forces, and survivor support programming and services. Financial distribution should prioritize survivor support and adapt to local needs and initiatives.
 - Adjusting Pennsylvania's forfeiture law distribution formula and adding prostitution as a forfeiture qualifying offense so more money remains with, and incentivizes, county anti-human trafficking efforts. The law could potentially mimic the drug forfeiture law.
 - Implementing outcome measures, standardized data, cross-system compatibility and coordination, and standards of care across funding and support systems. This includes effective follow-up and feedback systems.

Identified Challenge #2: Lack of Prevention Education

- Misconceptions of human trafficking persist in schools and families, with children particularly susceptible to technology-based exploitation such as image/video sharing and chatting through online games. Parents are unaware and children don't realize it's trafficking.
- Stigmas and scarce funding, training requirements, and stakeholder consensus contributes to prevention gaps in the education system.
- ***Recommendations from forum participants: mandated, school-based prevention education.***
 - Legislatively mandating and dedicating funding for age-appropriate, up-to-date, school-based human trafficking education for students and school personnel, particularly around digital trafficking and exploitation mechanisms. Delivery avenues include in-service training days, assemblies, in-class student programming, and/or parent nights.
 - Utilizing in-school and online trafficking simulations designed to properly engage students and reach rural and ESL populations.
 - Training administration on better deploying ChildLine with suspected child safety threats and equipping counselors with effective tools and questions.
 - Offering supplemental resources for guardians to identify risks and have conversations with children.

- Reaching children outside traditional schools, such as the Amish, through strategically placed resource materials.

Identified Challenge #3: Lack of Community Education and Professional Training

- The public often misunderstands trafficking, thinking it doesn't occur in their communities; many victims do not recognize their own trafficking.
- Children and Youth Services (CYS) workers, healthcare staff, and law enforcement lack accurate, consistent training on detecting and responding to trafficking. Where required, trainings are typically outdated or unenforced.
- Victims may fear deportation and often distrust officers and workers who don't deploy proper language and training.
- ***Recommendations from forum participants: enhanced awareness strategies.***
 - Requiring continuously updated community trainings and awareness campaigns, including community-specific initiatives (e.g. Amish and rural communities), to improve prevention and detection.
 - Mandating and funding industry-specific trainings for law enforcement, child services, healthcare, emergency services, and judicial and court staff as part of professional onboarding and continuous education.
 - Ensuring resources improve practical understanding of trauma, coercion, survivor behavior, available resources, proper intake procedures, and exploitation presentation in intimate partner violence, families, online, through grooming, and amidst drug use.

Identified Challenge #4: Outdated Child Victim Policies

- Outdated policies and foster care regulations, insufficient placements, and inconsistent access to expert CYs workers within the delinquency and dependency systems further harm at-risk and exploited children.
- Law enforcement, child services, and the courts often misidentify youth trafficking cases and send victimized youth to juvenile services/facilities or group homes ill-equipped to support victim needs.
- Children are frequently burdened with "outing" their perpetrators and seldom have safe environments in which to disclose abuse and access therapeutic interventions.
- ***Recommendations from forum participants: modernizing child protection policies.***
 - Establishing clear legal definitions across all statutes, professional standards, and policies for law enforcement, child welfare, and victim services to better collaborate on suspected human trafficking situations—from initial reports to placements.

- Equipping officials and community partners to better identify trafficking situations and avoid sending victims to juvenile facilities unable to adequately serve or protect them.
- Investing in adequate safe placements, diversion programs, and victim services and expanding least restrictive placement availability for youth who cannot remain safely at home, while also ensuring young people have access to therapeutic, wraparound interventions.

Identified Challenge #5: Limited Survivor Supports

- Victims lack a clear support system, including wrap-around, gender-specific services and crisis, transitional, and long-term housing (with survivors often sent to retraumatizing hotels or facilities ill-equipped for their complex trauma).
- Criminal records resulting from their trafficking create employment, licensing, housing, and child custody barriers.
- Lack of understanding about their exploitation and lack of knowledge about aftercare resources available to them leaves survivors vulnerable to re-exploitation.
- Imprisonment or community service requirements often prohibit victims from accessing timely resources and treatment, increasing the likelihood of revictimization.
- Mishandling of cases and survivors involved, due to lack of education and protocols on human trafficking, creates further distrust with law enforcement and officials.
- ***Recommendations from forum participants: investing in survivors.***
 - Funding, and improved reimbursement systems for, victim services, transportation, and crisis, transitional, and long-term housing.
 - Reevaluating state regulations and qualification standards to increase shelter availability and drug treatment, housing, and employment access.
 - Equipping victim/support staff to support potential victims throughout the legal, healthcare, and social services systems.
 - Investing in victim education, employment opportunities, scholarships, and compensation for anti-trafficking contributions.

Identified Challenge #6: Limited Prosecution and Protection

- Law enforcement has few specialized units and staff—including computer, financial, and forensic investigators—to tackle human trafficking cases and meet forfeiture standards. Task forces and MBTs are further underfunded and struggle to support victims across jurisdictions.
- Language barriers and difficulty proving coercion and fraud frequently causes the legal system to depend upon survivor testimony or drop potential cases.

- The investigation and court system can retraumatize victims. Personnel may misunderstand trafficking dynamics and trauma responses, causing victims to feel unsafe, discouraged, and unwilling to participate in the investigation and legal process.
- ***Recommendations from forum participants: improving trafficking investigations and prosecution.***
 - Investing in specialized human trafficking units/full-time personnel in district and state prosecutorial and law enforcement offices. This includes supporting task forces, MBTs, and regional support for rural communities.
 - Updating Pennsylvania’s criminal code—specifically adjusting offense grading, clarifying definitions, imposing stricter buyer penalties, and classifying trafficking as a violent crime—to better address demand and exploitation.
 - Improving access to defense attorneys and vacatur.
 - Mandating human trafficking and trauma-informed practices among judges, prosecutors, public defenders, court staff, and juries. Survivors should have clear court preparation, and courtroom practices should use respectful language, allow breaks, minimize aggressive or repetitive questioning, and implement survivor supports such as advocate access, separate waiting areas, and expert testimony.

Identified Challenge #7: Limited Business Regulations

- Lax criminal and civil regulations let patrons, traffickers, and businesses, including the deep-pocketed Illicit Massage Industry, exploit loopholes and avoid meaningful consequences.
- Department of State inspectors and law enforcement seldom coordinate anti-human trafficking operations, thus ineffectively addressing supply and demand systems.
- ***Recommendations from forum participants: enhancing business regulations of trafficking-related industries.***
 - Improving state inspection processes and sharpening regulatory rules on businesses that knowingly enable traffickers.
 - Pursuing policies inspired by county models allowing jurisdictions to shut down illicit human trafficking businesses on civil public nuisance codes such as operating hours and lighting. Collaboration between criminal and civil enforcers can improve enforcement and further warn landlords they may be aiding and abetting tenants’ illicit activities.

- Implementing industry-specific incentives such as tax credits or certifications of excellence to reward effective business/community anti-trafficking collaboration.