

Co chairs Broadman and Evans, and members of the subcommittee on public safety,

My name is Detective Timothy Larsen and I am with the Portland Police Bureau's Human Trafficking Unit. I am honored to testify today in support of a new Organized Crime proposal that would work in partnership with local law enforcement. Along with investigating human trafficking for the Bureau, I am also a federal task force officer. I started my work in human trafficking in 2013 by being a part of missions to address trafficking in Portland. These missions often were focused on addressing the demand (sex buyers) as well as contact victims of trafficking and attempt to provide resources. This often led us to traffickers and we would build cases on them. In 2019, I was brought on to the Human Trafficking Unit fulltime and have been investigating these cases, for the most part, since.

Currently the Human Trafficking Unit, which is comprised of a sergeant, 2 detectives, 3 officers, and an analyst. We use advocates from our Victim Services Unit as well as a community advocacy group Safety Compass. We run missions primarily to address community concerns, but they are costly due to the resources needed as the unit is small, therefore we have collaborated with partner agencies (both state and federal). Our unit uses best practice when contacting victims of trafficking by implementing a victim centered approach and being trauma informed.

Human Trafficking, which many believe to be the forcing of another to sex is only one part of these types of cases. It has been my experience; trafficking is seen and affects all of our communities and does not have a particular victimology other than vulnerabilities which are identified and exploited by savvy traffickers. These vulnerabilities are often seen as basic needs (housing, food, clothing, etc), self-esteem, love / acceptance, and attention to name a few.

Human trafficking sees no boundaries in the race, gender, age or economic status of those it affects. It is often violent and raises the lethality of adult victims by nearly 200 percent by some nationwide studies and our youth population of victims being at nearly 1,114 percent. Often times, the victims of these crimes are affected by substance abuse, lifetime mental health issues, and we unfortunately see often victims being brought back into the life even when we think they are set on the right path with resources. These cases are often difficult on many levels to include unwilling victims, victims who don't see themselves as victims, and threats of harm or worse to them, their families, and friends.

As many have seen throughout the state in the past few years, agencies are struggling to get proper staffing and tools to stay up on the ever-increasing change in technology as well as addressing crime occurring in our communities. Our own agency has been working diligently on staffing the department. We see trafficking does not stay in one geographical location so the collaboration of statewide agencies and information sharing is paramount. The demand of the investigators to go through all of the data, write reports, and search warrants, often takes a long time to get a case to a point where we can move to an indictment, which can sway a victim in whether they will participate in the process.

I'd like to share about one of my cases to illustrate how time-intensive the investigations of these cases are. In December of 2018, I came into contact with a youth who was caught shoplifting. She was a reported runaway and had been a victim of trafficking in the past.

I worked on building trust with the youth, and coordinated with her case worker, whom she trusted, to come and get her rather than take her to a juvenile detention. I could tell she had not eaten anything, so I made sure some of her basic needs were being met and we got her snacks and a beverage.

I was contacted by the case worker in January of 2019, stating the youth had run away again and was feared to be with a trafficker.

The DHS worker was provided with a phone number for the trafficker and with the use of online tools, I was able to find online sexual advertisements of the youth along with the trafficker. This aided in the identification of the trafficker.

During the investigation, we learned there were multiple social media accounts, websites, and electronic devices which had evidence of the crimes of Compelling Prostitution, Promoting Prostitution, manufacturing child pornography, among other crimes.

We also found the trafficker was on probation with the neighboring state and was a convicted sex offender already. These were helpful in identifying information about the subject as well as helped provide evidence of additional violations and / or crimes.

Once the trafficker was arrested, we collected and served warrants on the devices. This included multiple electronic devices such as multiple cellphones, tablets and laptops. At the time, numerous items of evidence were collected and aided in securing a federal indictment for manufacturing child pornography.

This case took significant time in the court system, during which the youth ran and absconded her probation which she was under for unrelated charges multiple times.

As the case went on, I was contacted by the youth, while wanted on a warrant, and wanted to let me know the trafficker was able to identify a phone number for her and reach out from jail. He attempted to intimidate her and tamper with the case along with having another associate of his contact and intimidated her. I quickly informed the DA I was working with and I pursued additional charges for tampering.

If we have more collaboration on the cases, dividing up the labor with skilled investigators and analysts to help build links to parties related to the investigation, we can see faster prosecution and ensure we are doing right for the victims of these heinous crimes.

I urge you to support the new organized crime proposal in HB 5014.

Sincerely,

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