

Maryland's Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking

Maryland's response to human trafficking has developed dramatically since the first Governor's Conference on Combating Human Trafficking in Maryland in 2012. At that time, the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), Department of Human Resources (DHR), Maryland State Police (MSP), and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) implemented targeted human trafficking policies, which included training, risk assessment tools, and data collection protocols. After the first year, these agencies assessed their individual responses to human trafficking and responded accordingly. The initial data flowing from the implemented policies reflected increased awareness and a consistent victim-centered approach. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) were added to the statewide strategic plan for combating human trafficking in 2013.

In March 2014, GOCCP established a *Maryland Human Trafficking Policy Advisor* position to develop and implement policies, training, and data collection procedures that build Maryland's capacity to combat trafficking and serve survivors. The Advisor's responsibilities include working with government agencies and non-government organizations that serve or are training to serve sex and labor trafficking survivor populations of foreign and domestic children, women, and men. Within this scope, the Advisor provides programmatic and logistical support to the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MHTTF) by serving as a communication link between subcommittees, identifying overlap and common areas of need, and providing administrative and technical support to the coordinator and subcommittee chairs.

The crucial next step is ensuring that every victim that comes in contact with a state agency is identified and properly served. This will be accomplished through increased communication, strengthened inter-agency relationships and improved data collection. As agencies have developed and implemented their own policies, the common barrier is a lack of data to support necessary tools and interventions. As a result, the MHTTF is promoting data collection within its task force members. The Victim Service Subcommittee has already initiated Phase I of the project. The Law Enforcement Subcommittee and Human Trafficking Policy Advisor will assist in collection in the coming year and create a method to easily collect real-time data on current law enforcement cases. A strategic approach to collecting as much real-time data as possible on reported survivors will increase the resources invested and supply momentum for additional policy changes at the state level.

Continued collaboration between state agencies and the MHTTF has shown to be extremely valuable for both. MHTTF members have assisted DJS, DHR, DPSCS and DHMH in developing and implementing policy, procedures and training. Agencies are active members of the MHTTF steering committee and every subcommittee. These relationships have changed the way that Maryland combats human trafficking and has led to the rescue of innumerable survivors through prevention and intervention.