

- [Home](#)
- [Advertising Information](#)
- [Special Reports Program](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [News Room Submission](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Newsstand Locations](#)
- [Delivery Zones](#)
- [Legislative Session Calendar](#)
- [Legislative Member Directory](#)
- [Internship Opportunities](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Bill Status Hotline

New York State Senate
  [Live Audio](#)

New York State Assembly
  [Live Audio](#)

LEGISLATIVEGAZETTE.com

Task force hears suggestions for enforcing human trafficking law

[Printable Version](#)

By KYLE MILLER
 Legislative Gazette Staff Writer
 Mon, Dec 17, 2007

The New York State Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking last week sought the recommendations of nonprofit organizations and service providers in implementing the state's months-old human trafficking law.

"We have clearly come a long, long way, but this effort and initiative is like a three-legged stool," said Division of Criminal Justice Commissioner Denise E. O'Donnell, who co-chairs the task force. "It will not stand, at least not sturdily, without your support. You are like our critical sources at the ground level."

The task force heard testimony from more than 20 organizations and service providers at a hearing in Albany last Tuesday.

"As the most comprehensive anti-trafficking law in the country to date, New York state's anti-trafficking law is already a model nationally," said Dorchen Leidholdt, co-executive director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. "But implementing it so that it achieves its goal will take energy, dedication and resources on an ongoing basis."

The day's presenters focused on both the law enforcement aspect of stopping the practice of human trafficking for sex and labor and improving social services available to the victims.

Signed into law by Gov. Eliot Spitzer in June, the human trafficking law created harsher penalties for human traffickers and provides for assistance to victims of prostitution and involuntary labor. The task force, co-chaired by O'Donnell and Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance Commissioner David Hansell, incorporates 10 state agencies in the interest of enforcing the law through a coordinated effort.

Attacking human sex trafficking from the demand side was a common thread of discussion.

"According to the [Department of Criminal Justice Services], in 1999 there were 6,182 arrests for prostitution, but only 1,180 arrests for patronizing," said Antonia Kirkland, program director for Equality Now. "We believe these numbers should be reversed."

The new human trafficking law did increase the charge of patronizing a prostitute from a B-level misdemeanor to an A-level misdemeanor, but the organizations argued that a change of attitude among law enforcement is necessary to fully implement the changes.

"Police officers tend to subscribe to similar views on prostitution as the general public," said Laurel Eisner, executive director of Sanctuary for Families. "That it is a victimless crime. That if it does involve criminal activity, the criminal is the prostituted woman or girl who has chosen to enter and remain in the world's oldest profession."

Eisner said police officers should seek the cooperation of victim advocacy groups whenever possible in dealing with instances of human trafficking.

Also recommended was a concerted effort by the state to shut down massage parlors that act as fronts for prostitution and that funds be set aside for public education campaigns aimed at those who patronize sex workers.

Other groups contend that although headlines and law enforcement focus on sex trafficking, forced labor is becoming a secondary concern. Kavitha Sreeharsha, a staff attorney for Legal Momentum, noted that the penalty for labor trafficking is not as harsh under the new law.

"The state of New York has a unique opportunity to implement the statute in a way that shifts public and government perception away from the misguided notion that human trafficking encompasses only sex trafficking," she said.

Owen Thompson, a paralegal for Farmworker Legal Services of New York, testified that human trafficking on farms is allowed to continue because their workers are isolated from the rest of society.

"The state government should bolster any effort to integrate these farm workers into their communities," he said.

Other groups identified the need for the system of identifying cases of human trafficking to be as streamlined as possible and for tip lines directed to law enforcement in places like hospitals and schools.

Whether escaping forced sex or forced labor, victims of human trafficking need a wide variety of social services that must be more adequately funded, agreed many of the groups. Medical, mental health, transportation, employment, food stamp and translation needs were



SOVEREIGN HOTEL
 PerDiem Package
\$105.00

Based on F10500 Lodging/Per Diem Rate - Albany NY


Click here to Book it now!
 Call: (518) 489-2981
 Direct Toll Free: 1-888-963-7666

1228 Western Ave.
 Albany, NY 12203
(Off I-19 NYS Thruway, Across from SUNY)



The health insurance program designed for New York State's public employees, their families, and their employers.

Click here 



WAMC
 NORTH EAST PUBLIC RADIO
90.3FM AND 1400AM
IN ALBANY AND ALWAYS ONLINE AT WAMC.ORG

Elegant & Luxurious
 68 Room Hotel
 W/ Four Apartments
 Pillow-Top Mattresses
 Free Buffet Breakfast




Century House
Hotel / Restaurant / Conference Center
518.785.0931
 Click on this ad to visit our website

all mentioned, as was improving the current ad-hoc system of temporary housing.

"Housing options are often severely limited and at times inappropriate," said Kelly Agnew-Barajas of Catholic Charities. "Catholic Charities recommends that specialty housing programs be considered and developed to address unique needs of trafficking victims who need considerable housing support as well as strict confidentiality."

Karen Cheeks-Lomax, executive director of My Sister's Place, noted that as the new law promotes more extensive crackdowns of human trafficking, organizations like hers will need additional funding to deal with the influx of victims.

"The current funding levels are not sufficient to meet the volume and specificity, but more importantly, the expertise that is needed to deal with this vulnerable population," she said. "Their needs are different."

Keywords: None Given



Wilson Elser
Wilson Elser Moskowitz
Edelman & Dicker LLP

677 Broadway
Albany, NY 12207-2996
p 518.449.8893
f 518.449.8927

150 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017-5639
p 212.490.3000
f 212.490.3038

www.WilsonElser.com

**YOUR JOB.
OUR TRUCKS.**



AN AVISTAR COMPANY

Find your nearest
International dealer
to learn more.