

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HILDA L. SOLIS

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AND HOLLY J. MITCHELL

Proclaim January as “Human Trafficking Prevention Month”

Human trafficking is a growing epidemic across the world. Human trafficking encompasses the acts of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for labor or commercial sex acts through force, fraud, or coercion. Under U.S. law, the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth (CSEC/Y), or the trafficking of minors for commercial sex, does not require the use of force, fraud, or coercion to be considered trafficking. California law mandates that commercially sexually exploited minors are considered victims of a severe form of child abuse.

Los Angeles County (County), the nation’s most populous county, is an epicenter for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of large numbers of children and youth. The FBI listed the Los Angeles metropolitan area as one of the nation’s 13 “High Intensity Child Exploitation Areas” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). The County Child Protection Hotline has seen a steady increase in the number of calls

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reporting the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth from Fiscal Year 2013-2014 to Fiscal Year 2019-2020, with the latest data showing a 40% increase in the number of calls from FY 2018-2019 to FY 2019-2020.

Childhood physical and sexual abuse, emotional neglect, foster care and/or juvenile justice involvement, and/or homelessness make children especially vulnerable to CSE. Exploiters target and prey on these vulnerabilities, often coercing and manipulating children and youth into the sex trade with promises of love and acts of kindness alternated with violence and threats, which often results in trauma bonding. Children and youth are often exploited by people they know, some by gangs, and others are trafficked by their own families. As a result of the extreme abuse and trauma they have endured, victims of CSE often experience mental, physical, and sexual/reproductive health issues.

Over the past decade, the County has become a national leader in its efforts to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth. Since 2010, the County has led initiatives to prevent youth from being commercially sexually exploited, proactively identify youth who have experienced CSE, connect youth with intensive, specialized services, and implement dynamic education campaigns and widespread training initiatives. Through creativity, collaboration, and commitment--together with County agencies and leaders--the County has taken steps to ensure children are not criminalized for their exploitation, but instead empowered with the support and services they need to meet their goals, heal, and thrive.

To highlight these efforts, the County, in partnership with the National Center for Youth Law, recently released a report, "Building Bridges: How Los Angeles County

Came Together to Support Children and Youth Impacted by Commercial Sexual Exploitation.” The goal of the report is to reflect on the County’s work over the past ten years to support youth who have experienced CSE, to highlight innovative programs and practices the County has developed, to share lessons learned with other jurisdictions, and to celebrate the individuals who have made these tremendous improvements possible. The report recognizes the County’s efforts to center and amplify survivors in the development of County policies and practices and highlights the County’s expansive efforts to educate the masses, respond to legislative changes, foster multidisciplinary collaboration, design innovative protocols, support youth through education and empowerment, address the specialized housing needs of youth who have experienced CSE, and much more.

And while tremendous progress has been made, the County is steadfast in its commitment to tackle the significant work that remains. This includes raising more awareness of the issue, increasing prevention efforts, building capacity to provide quality services and support to survivors, and strengthening multidisciplinary partnerships. The County also remains committed to continuously improving its response to this issue by evaluating what is working and where there is room for advancement.

In 2007, the U.S. Senate designated January 11 as Human Trafficking Awareness Day. On January 4, 2010, President Obama issued a proclamation declaring January as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. To commemorate these occasions, all Angelenos are encouraged to learn how to identify, prevent, and report instances of human trafficking.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors proclaim January 2021 as “Human Trafficking Prevention Month” in Los Angeles County and encourage members of the public to visit <https://www.lacounty.gov/human-trafficking> to learn more about the issue and find ways to join the fight against human trafficking.

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