

## **Maryland is The Hub for Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world, with an estimated 27 Million victims and \$150 billion in profits. While an estimated 14,000 -17,500 people are trafficked into the United States, 200,000 are from the United States. Traffickers predominately target women and girls, as young as 12 years of age, for labor and sexual exploitation. The intersectionality of sexism, racism, poverty, trauma, adultification, sexualization are all systemic conditions that allow women and girls of color to become easy targets for traffickers.

Baltimore is at the intersection of this issue. All major transportation thoroughfares (i.e.,the Port of Baltimore, I-95/I-70 bus stations and truck stops, BWI airport and Amtrak) conveniently merge into our hospitality destinations (i.e., the convention center, casinos, hotels, and ball parks), easily enabling human traffickers to entrap, transport, and exploit victims.

Women and girls forced into sex trafficking experience higher levels of anxiety, isolation, and trauma far beyond other crime victims. They sustain physical assaults that result in repeated broken bones, concussions, bruises, burns and starvation. Withholding birth control and gynecological care make them susceptible to life-long, and life-threatening reproductive diseases and injuries such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages and infertility. Drug and alcohol addiction is also prevalent among victims of sex trafficking.

## **Legislation that Protects Victims and Targets Perpetrators**

The Maryland General Assembly is strategically poised to not only address human trafficking in state, but throughout the country. Marylands recent response to human trafficking has been to decriminalize adult prostitution, converting prison programs into treatment facilities for sexual, physical and psychological trauma, addiction, and transitional housing for survivors. Safe Harbor legislation will extend similar provisions for child victims of sex trafficking. However, the overwhelming majority of human traffickers and clients are not investigated, prosecuted or convicted," perpetuating this insidious problem.

According to the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force in 2014, the United States investigated 1,927 cases, prosecuted 253 defendants and convicted 174 traffickers. Law enforcement and States Attorneys need assistance from the hospitality industry to identify victims, and obtain evidence to prosecute traffickers and clients. Addressing this issue in the upcoming Legislative Session are Senator Michael Jackson and Delegate Eric Ebersole who will re-introduce legislation requiring innkeepers to maintain computerized records of all guest transactions and receipts for 18 months. Additionally, all employees will receive training to identify and report suspected human trafficking. This documentation can result in more investigations, prosecutions and convictions of traffickers and clients. As well, broadening awareness, identification and reporting will increase the rescue and recovery of victims.