

LWVO State House Day – March 7, 2017

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Human trafficking, both labor and sex trafficking, is a multi-million dollar enterprise. Ohio continues to be a hot spot, even with a significantly improved capacity to address the issues through legislation and aggressive law enforcement. The Polaris Project, the nonprofit that runs the national trafficking hotline, reports that Ohio had 277 adjudicated cases of sex trafficking and 42 cases of labor trafficking in 2016.

A quarter of the cases cited involved a juvenile; runaway and homeless youth are particularly vulnerable. Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine recently announced that the Bureau of Criminal Investigation's Crimes Against Children Unit will be watching a missing-children data base to identify potential trafficking victims and sharing information with local law enforcement in a targeted effort to help chronic runaways. Continuing education is also required of local law enforcement to aid in identifying these children.

The emphasis on expanding awareness through training continues. Licensure for several professional groups now requires continuing education on legislation and trends in human trafficking. Curricula are available for working with school children in grades K-12. Police departments are participating in trafficking task forces that are identifying potential victims, rescuing them and referring them for social services. The Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission continues to meet regularly to coordinate statewide efforts to curb trafficking.

On the legislative side, SB4 expands the list of criminal offenses that may be expunged from the records of victims of trafficking who committed crimes as the result of trafficking. Criminal convictions make it difficult for survivors to find jobs or housing, and the expungement will allow them better opportunities to rebuild their lives. A similar bill passed the senate unanimously last year but was not taken up by the house. LWVO can support this bill based on our position to facilitate victim integration back into the community. The bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Several local Leagues around Ohio continue to be concerned with human trafficking issues and continue to be supportive of efforts on behalf of survivors. This work is best done in cooperation with other local organizations. Most of Ohio is now covered by anti-trafficking coalitions. Go to www.humantrafficking.ohio.gov/coalitions to see the service areas and the names of the coalitions.

TO DO: Add your support for SB4; the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee is Sen. Kevin Bacon, 614-466-8064. Combatting human trafficking does not end with the passage of legislation. Please continue to join and support your local coalitions in their work.