



HUMAN TRAFFICKING | Congress ramps up efforts to fight problem

NEW FUNDS PROMPT NEW HOPE

From prevention to prosecution, push aims to help victims and halt traffickers.

By MIKE MCGRAW and LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

America's war on human trafficking got its biggest-ever one-year boost in federal funding following President Barack Obama's signing of an appropriations bill, one of several significant anti-trafficking developments this week.

The legislation contains a \$12.5 million increase in funds to fight human trafficking in the United States. That money and other provisions of the law address problems identified in a five-part series this week in The Kansas City Star.

Included in the omnibus appropriation bill signed into law Wednesday is money to provide services to U.S.-born human trafficking victims — mainly underage girls forced into the sex trade. Previously, only foreign-born victims got federal anti-trafficking aid.

Jolene Smith, CEO and co-founder of Free the Slaves, called the additional funding

@ Go to KansasCity.com for the five-part Human Trafficking in America series, plus videos and photos.

a "watershed moment."
"The fact that we were able to get this increase in such a tough economic climate shows that the U.S. is moving in the right direction," Smith said.

She noted that The Star's series helped focus needed attention on human trafficking, but she added that more money alone won't solve the problem.

"This is an incremental increase," she said. "It is not transformational."

Meanwhile, a California congresswoman said Thursday that she would use The Star's investigation of human trafficking at upcoming oversight hearings to help reform U.S. detention and deportation policies.

"We are concerned about deportation practices, so we may do some combination oversight hearings," said U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren, a Democrat whose House subcommittee oversees detention and de-

SEE TRAFFICKING | A14

TRAFFICKING: Enforcement is bolstered

FROM AIR portation rules. "Your findings should get wider circulation."

The Star's series examined America's failures to find and rescue tens of thousands of human trafficking victims estimated to be in the United States. The newspaper also found that U.S. officials too often deported and abused those victims, some on Kansas City-based government airlines.

Lofgren said that she and a colleague, in consultation with Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, also introduced a bill Wednesday to reform the H-2B work visa program, which The Star found is often used fraudulently by traffickers.

And Cabinet officials within the Obama administration have said that in January they will announce a major set of initiatives in the anti-trafficking battle.

But it was the additional funding that anti-trafficking groups were applauding the loudest Thursday.

"We are delighted about a 25 percent increase in appropri-

ations overall, and we are delighted it covers both foreign nationals and domestic victims," said Mark Lagon, former State Department anti-trafficking czar and now CEO of the Polaris Project, a nonprofit group that combats human trafficking.

The measure also addresses problems with uneven enforcement of the federal anti-trafficking law and for the first time requires every U.S. attorney's office in the nation to designate a human trafficking point person.

In western Missouri, Assistant U.S. Attorney Cynthia Cordes already has assumed that role and used it to help her office prosecute more alleged traffickers than any other U.S. attorney in the country.

The addition of such an anti-trafficking contact in U.S. attorneys' offices should "improve communication and coordination within each jurisdiction, including with victim services organizations, in order to better serve the victims of human trafficking and slavery," ac-

ording to the new legislation.

The funding measure was pushed by members of the congressional human trafficking caucus, including Rep. Chris Smith, a New Jersey Republican, and Rep. Carolyn Maloney, a New York Democrat.

Overall, the \$12.5 million in increased appropriations will provide a 25 percent increase in funding for counseling, housing and legal assistance for trafficking survivors. That includes more money for human trafficking task forces around the country, including one in Kansas City.

Of the total, \$5.3 million will go to the Department of Justice's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, a 50 percent increase from last year.

The unit has posted a 600 percent increase in its caseload over the past four years. Many trafficking experts had told The Star that — despite increased prosecutions — the federal government is not convicting as many traffickers as other countries with good anti-

trafficking records.

An additional \$6 million will go to the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, a 34 percent increase from last year.

The U.S. Department of Labor's International Labor Affairs Bureau will receive a 7 percent increase, for a total of \$93 million. Some of those dollars will be used for anti-trafficking efforts.

But Jolene Smith pointed out that all U.S. citizens could help fight human trafficking around the world by simply changing their buying habits.

"We need to make it clear to businesses that slavery is too high a price to pay for cheap goods," she said. "Businesses need to ... uncover whether there is slavery in their supply chain and, if so, work together with communities and governments to root it out."

To reach Mike McGraw, call 816-234-4423 or send e-mail to mcgraw@kcstar.com.

To reach Laura Bauer, call 816-234-4944 or send e-mail to lbauer@kcstar.com.