

Detective Helps Fight Trafficking on Maryland's Eastern Shore

Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises in the world, and Maryland is not immune, including its rural areas. While the presence of human trafficking in urban areas might be expected, those working to prevent human trafficking in Maryland's quieter communities say its presence there can be shocking to local residents, even those involved in law enforcement. On Maryland's Eastern Shore, Det. Cpl. Milton Orellana, assistant supervisor for the Criminal Investigation Division of the Easton, Maryland, Department of Police, regularly reaches out to members of the Eastern Shore community to spread the word about the presence of human trafficking there. This includes the Eastern Shore Criminal Justice Academy, which conducts mandatory training for law enforcement and correctional officers. "Every new law enforcement officer needs to be familiar with the problem and know what to watch out for," he said.

Trafficking crimes committed in the state include the recruitment, enslavement, and sale of children and adults for sexual purposes, as well as forced labor practices involving children and adults. Orellana said trafficking crimes involving youth on the Eastern Shore are most commonly related to prostitution. The detective said he was not surprised himself by the prevalence of the human trafficking problem in such a relatively quiet part of the state. "The sex industry is everywhere, so in that respect, the problem will show up wherever there's a market for it, whether it's urban areas or rural areas," he said. What he finds most difficult is working with those who have been victimized, especially children and youth. "They're afraid themselves and don't want to tell you what's happening," he said. "It's frustrating. We want to stop this from happening, but we have to have a willing witness to prosecute, so often there's nothing we can do from a law enforcement standpoint."

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 250,000 youth are at risk nationally. Officials caution that there is no accurate way to determine the actual number of youth involved or at risk because so many cases go unreported. Orellana said in many cases, youth involved in human trafficking will try to avoid any kind of help or outreach.

"Fear is a big factor – the kids are afraid to say anything," Orellana said. "They're often runaways who are hiding from their families. They're afraid of their pimps, but they're also afraid of law enforcement. They don't want to say anything, because they fear the consequences even more than the life they're being forced to lead."



One change that aims to help turn this cycle around came with the recently signed Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act. A provision of the new law requires state child welfare agencies to provide services for children involved in the child welfare system who are identified as victims or at risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking. This means that if law enforcement suspect that a youth is involved in human trafficking, but the youth will not admit it, the Department of Social Services (DSS) still must be brought in to help the child so that he or she does not fall through the cracks and face continued abuse.

“The DSS now has to get involved. If we can’t prove a juvenile has been trafficked, we try to get as many resources available to the child as possible, immediately, so that they now at least have a connection to people who can help them,” he said. “We no longer have to walk away from a situation where we think a youth is involved in trafficking but can’t prove it.”

Orellana is part of the Eastern Shore Human Trafficking Task Force, and works with the Talbot County Children’s Advocacy Center, which uses a multidisciplinary team approach to help children who are victims of sexual and physical abuse. The team includes mental health professionals, social workers, pediatricians, law enforcement officials, and prosecutors, who work in community so that a child does not have to endure questioning, exams and assessments multiple times. “When we suspect a child has been trafficked, we come together as a team, and determine the best approach to help the child. Medical exams, needs assessments and interviews are all done at once so we don’t have to revictimize the victim,” he said.

Orellana has participated in forums and workshops to spread the word about the problem. He says circumstances have made him a point of contact on the issue, due to the size of the problem and the fact that the local police jurisdictions do not have the manpower to dedicate whole departments to the problem, as they would in larger cities. However, they are still involved -- this summer, the Easton Police Department provided assistance for a week-long retreat for victims of human trafficking and at-risk youth that was hosted in Talbot County. Called “Hope for Healing” the retreat was created by Christine Dolan, an advocate for human trafficking issues and co-founder of the Children in Slavery Task Force, and designed to help young victims heal. It was the first retreat of its kind in the United States. Later, Orellana and



Dolan participated in a public forum on human trafficking designed to help educate area residents.

“Anything we can do to help stop this problem and take these victims, these kids, out of the cycle is worth it. It’s a joint effort, which is why the community needs to be aware,” he said.

Resources

Following are several resources available on human trafficking, in Maryland and nationwide.

- For information on the Eastern Shore Human Trafficking Task Force, visit their website by clicking [here](#).
- For information on The Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center, click [here](#).
- The FBI website has information on human trafficking nationwide; to access it, click [here](#).
- The Araminta Freedom Initiative is a nonprofit agency that deals exclusively with sex trafficking of children and youth in the Baltimore area. Visit their website by clicking [here](#).
- If you have information about a potential trafficking situation, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-373-7888. NHTRC is a national, toll-free hotline, with specialists available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day. For information on NHTRC, click [here](#).

