

RESOLUTION NO. 20240404-038

WHEREAS, human trafficking is a serious crime that exploits vulnerable individuals for forced labor, sex work, and other abusive practices, leading to profound physical, emotional, and psychological harm; and

WHEREAS, the City recognizes the horrors of human trafficking and the activity is a salacious for-profit business with victims as both currency and product; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that between 15,000 and 50,000 women and children are forced into sexual slavery in the United States every year; and

WHEREAS, a study from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimated the number of trafficked women and children is as high 240,000 and 325,000 per year, while a report from the University of Pennsylvania put the number of trafficked women and children between 100,000 and 300,000; and

WHEREAS, 20 years ago, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act enshrined the United States' commitment to combating human trafficking domestically and internationally; and

WHEREAS, many varieties of places, including, but not limited to, venues, such as hotels, motels, sports venues, restaurants, and factories, are often used as major venues for sex and labor trafficking, often through trafficker-controlled victims; and

WHEREAS, massage parlors, truck stops, and private residences are commonplace for trafficker-controlled environments and organizations where victims have no financial resources, contacts, or support that would equip them to flee captivity; and

WHEREAS, large scale public events often trigger human smuggling efforts due to the volume of people and how a chaotic environment can create challenges for law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 10,000 sex workers were brought to Miami for the 2010 Super Bowl, with similar reports made about the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil; and

WHEREAS, the City recognizes that some traffickers use various modes of transportation, not limited to, air travel, bus, train, and rideshare to avoid detection and to relocate victims; and

WHEREAS, according to the National Institute of Justice, 15% of the people classified as “trafficked” have been put into labor trafficking; and

WHEREAS, labor trafficking is most common in agriculture, and it encompasses both legal and undocumented workers with exploitive threats of violence, either to the worker or their loved ones, the threat of deportation, or perpetual debt that the worker or their family owes; and

WHEREAS, most cases involve the trafficker’s control of victims’ communication methods; and

WHEREAS, traffickers will participate in deliberate grooming and leverage any language barriers the victims have in order to gain control; and

WHEREAS, organized crime groups and individual traffickers will implement the use of virtual private networks, internet protocol address scramblers, and various methods to obscure their true identification to evade law enforcement detection and to keep victims in the dark; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit is the only full-time Austin agency dedicated to investigating human trafficking cases in Central Texas, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced resources and support in combating this pervasive issue; and

WHEREAS, this Resolution aligns with Resolution No. 20220915-052 that directed the City Manager to provide appropriate resources to vendors who do business with the City and encourage training to ensure vendors have the skills to recognize indicators of individuals experiencing homelessness at risk of human trafficking; and

WHEREAS, local emergency housing is critically needed to support victims of trafficking; and

WHEREAS, training local hospitality industry professionals and establishing relationships with hotels are vital strategies in identifying and reporting potential trafficking situations; and

WHEREAS, the internet is a prominent platform for traffickers, and educating parents and students about online safety risks is crucial in preventing child grooming, abductions, and entry into human smuggling; **NOW, THEREFORE,**

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to explore options with hoteliers to continue establishing safe and comprehensive emergency housing for trafficking victims within the first 24-72 hours of rescue, ensuring access to safe and supportive accommodations is established for immediate use.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to develop a comprehensive set of resources and an assessment program modeled after successful initiatives in other cities, aimed at enhancing human trafficking awareness and equipping hospitality industry employees with the necessary tools to identify and respond to potential trafficking situations effectively.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to explore creative options to provide law enforcement with covert digital payment resources for use in trafficking investigations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to explore ways to work with Austin – Bergstrom International Airport, CapMetro, Austin Transit Partnership, rideshare partners, and other relevant public transportation partners to develop strategies to help inform riders of trafficking activities, with information for victims.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to work with federal, state, and local law enforcement to develop a comprehensive plan to combat the use of stolen personal property by human traffickers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to explore additional state and federal grant opportunities for single and on-going anti-human trafficking initiatives.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to work with local school districts and community organizations to implement a comprehensive public safety education campaign on online risks and human trafficking awareness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to work with relevant stakeholders, community partners, and community members to develop a comprehensive online human trafficking tool kit on the City's website, or another appropriate website, that equips the community with anti-human trafficking information and tools, including, but not limited to:

- victim services resources;
- anonymous hotline;
- downloadable awareness materials;
- calendar of community engagement events;
- multi-language resources;
- human trafficking statistics; and
- artificial intelligence FAQ chat.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to collaborate with local community groups, partners, and other organizations to establish an annual human trafficking awareness event that, among other things, provides an opportunity for the community to receive education, victim services, and information of future community engagement initiatives.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to work with surrounding governmental entities to combat human trafficking, sharing information and resources.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to draft and send a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice, urging an increase to federal resources allocated to municipalities for combatting human trafficking, and adding this same goal to the City's federal legislative agenda.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to provide a progress update on these initiatives to the Public Safety Committee on June 10, 2024.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to report back to Council on the progress and status of these initiatives with a memorandum and presentation by no later than July 16, 2024.

ADOPTED: April 4, 2024 **ATTEST:**

Stephanie Hall for
Myrna Rios
City Clerk