

Michigan Human Trafficking Commission

*2023 Report to the Governor
and Legislature*

COMMISSION MEMBERS 2023

Ms. Kelly Carter, Commission Chair, Michigan Department of Attorney General – vacated seat July 2023

Mr. Forrest Pasanski, Vice-Chair, Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs – vacated seat 2023

Office of Governor (vacant)

Edward Price, Michigan State Police – vacated seat in 2023

Debi Cain, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services – vacated seat in 2023

Ms. Judith Emmons, Office of Senator Rick Outman; Emmons Farms – term ended March 2023

Ms. Kathleen Maitland, Michigan Abolitionist Project – term ended March 2023

Ms. Elizabeth Moon Carter, The Salvation Army – term ended March 2023

Mr. Hassan Beydoun, City of Detroit – term ended March 2023

Ms. Leslie King, founder/president of Sacred Beginnings

Ms. Alice Johnson, Neighborhood Legal Services of Michigan; Sister Survivor National Connect

Chief Chad Baugh, Canton Township Police Department – term ended March 2023

Hon. Lisa K. McCormick, Ingham County Circuit Court, Family Division

Mr. Jeff S. Getting, Kalamazoo County Prosecuting Attorney

COMMISSION MEMBERS 2024

Ms. Melissa Palepu, Commission Chair, Michigan Department of Attorney General
– term began January 2024

Mr. Michael Draminski, Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Governor (vacant)

Mr. Jonathan Walden, Michigan State Police

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Designee (vacant)

Mr. Benjamin O’Hearn, Migrant Legal Aid– term began January 2024

Ms. Katie Papke, Life Support Counseling and Coaching – term began January
2024

Speaker of the House Designee (vacant)

Speaker of the House Designee (vacant)

Ms. Leslie King, founder/president of Sacred Beginnings

Ms. Alice Johnson, Neighborhood Legal Services of Michigan; Sister Survivor
National Connect

Law Enforcement Designee (vacant)

Hon. Lisa K. McCormick, Ingham County Circuit Court, Family Division

Mr. Jeff S. Getting, Kalamazoo County Prosecuting Attorney

MESSAGE FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Human Trafficking continues to plague the State of Michigan by victimizing its most vulnerable citizens. Currently the State of Michigan ranks high in the number of confirmed cases of human trafficking, with more than 200 confirmed cases in the latest report from the National Human Trafficking Hotline. While statistics are not always reliable when it comes to human trafficking due to the lack of records and reporting, this is an alarming number that is likely much lower than the actual number of human trafficking cases within the State of Michigan. In fact, based upon the data collected from the National Human Trafficking Hotline, Michigan ranks only behind California, Florida, New York, and Texas for the number of confirmed cases.

These numbers indicate that the State of Michigan has more work to do to protect our most vulnerable populations and the State must act in unison with our many partners already present in the fight against human trafficking. The State must ensure our laws are not only protecting our citizens but also deter criminal behavior and that the laws are responsive to the needs of victims and survivors. We must encourage open discussions regarding human trafficking and its impact within our communities. We must also educate the population on not only how to identify human trafficking but also what to do when you suspect human trafficking and how to stop human trafficking before it even begins.

The Department of Attorney General takes these matters very seriously and will continue to play an active role in the ongoing fight against human trafficking by working with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to prosecute perpetrators of human trafficking, as well as by working with the many amazing advocacy groups to ensure that victims and survivors of human trafficking may move forward and break free from the chains of this modern-day form of slavery.

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STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Human trafficking is the recruitment, enticement, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining an individual by any means for forced labor or services (which includes commercial sexual activity) or debt bondage. This is criminal activity that plagues the entire United States, with the State of Michigan ranking high in the United States for instances of human trafficking. In fact, in 2021 the National Human Trafficking Hotline's statistics indicated that Michigan ranked fifth in the Nation for highest number of tips regarding human trafficking and confirmed cases. Michigan had 1186 tips and 295 confirmed cases, ranking only behind California, Florida, New York, and Texas. This is one reason why the work of the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission is so important.

The Michigan Human Trafficking Commission (hereafter, "Commission") was established in March of 2013 with an exploratory committee gathering information by way of expert presentations, speaking with human trafficking survivors, and working with those already engaged in the field of human trafficking awareness, academia, and law enforcement. The result of this work was the establishment of the Human Trafficking Commission Act, Act 325 of 2014, which took effect January 14, 2015. This Act may be found in Michigan Compiled Laws Section 752.971 et seq.

Michigan Compiled Law 752.973 creates the Commission and sets forth the guiding principles and purposes of the Commission. The Commission is housed within the Michigan Department of Attorney General and must include the following members: a designee from the Governor's Office, a designee from the Attorney's General Office, a designee from the Michigan State Police, a designee from the Department of Health and Human Services, a designee from the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, two individuals chosen from a list provided by the Senate Majority Leader, two individuals chosen from a list provided by the Speaker of the House, a circuit court judge who serves in family court, a county prosecuting attorney, a designee representing law enforcement, and two survivors of human trafficking. This is a diverse group of individuals who would represent the many different complex aspects and areas of human trafficking. The diversity of the skillset seeks to enhance the work of the Commission.

COMMISSION MEETINGS AND EXPLANATION

Pursuant to Michigan Compiled Laws 752.973(6), the Commission is to meet at least four times a year to discuss and work towards the goals of the Commission. These meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Act, 1976 PA 267, MCL 15.261 to 15.275.

Due to a lack of available participating members of the Commission, a result of expired terms and resignations, the Commission was only able to meet once during the 2023 year. The Commission met on January 10, 2023. Additional meetings were scheduled for DATES, however, due to a lack of membership those meetings were cancelled. Additionally, the Chair of the Commission resigned in June of 2023 and the Vice-Chair resigned in early 2023 as well. As a result of the resignations, no meetings could be called to order until a new Chair was appointed. A new Chair was not appointed until January of 2024. The new Chair is Melissa Palepu, Attorney Specialist in Human Trafficking and Child Abuse with the Department of Attorney General.

COMMITTEES WITHIN THE COMMISSION

The Commission was created to perform very specific tasks associated with combating human trafficking. The Commission must identify funding sources that would assist in understanding and combating human trafficking in Michigan; fund research programs to determine the extent and nature of human trafficking in Michigan; provide education and training about human trafficking; collect and analyze relevant data related to human trafficking; coordinate with other groups, governmental agencies and organizations active in this area; provide awareness of available victim services; bring public awareness about human trafficking; and assist in ensuring the state laws and administrative rules are effective and address the needs and issues regarding human trafficking. These tasks are enumerated in Michigan Compiled Laws 752.974. To ensure these important and complex tasks are completed and done with the upmost attention and care, the Commission has created subcommittees that break down and tackle these numerous areas of work.

Data Collection and Research

This committee reviews strategies to collect statewide data to enable policymakers and law enforcement to assess progress in the efforts to combat human trafficking throughout the State of Michigan.

Given the lack of membership in 2023, this committee has no new information to add to the work completed in 2022. Moving forward, this committee hopes to provide a better understanding of the number of human trafficking tips that came in through various sources, the number of victims rescued from human trafficking, the number of offenders arrested, and the number of prosecutions related to human trafficking. This data will allow policymakers, advocacy groups, and law enforcement to better focus their resources and attention on areas in most need and ensure the safety of our communities.

Funding and Resources

The Funding and Resources committee is tasked with identifying and applying for grants and other funding sources.

As the Commission was unable to fully meet and carry out its statutory tasks in 2023, there is no additional information to provide from the report in 2022. In 2024, the committee will focus on ensuring more funding is being provided to advocacy groups working in the space of human trafficking, working with law enforcement to ensure that the needs of such law enforcement agencies are being met so that they may investigate and enforce human trafficking laws, and work on ensuring survivors are able to find funds for housing, drug and mental health treatment, and other everyday needs.

Policy and Legislation

In this committee, members review and analyze human trafficking laws and policies to determine whether recommendations should be made to policymakers regarding current laws and policies and regarding whether new laws or policies should be written.

In 2023, the Michigan Legislature continued its work on very important human trafficking legislation. This committee will continue to assist Michigan legislators in updating Michigan's human trafficking laws to better reflect the needs of the state, to ensure offenders are held accountable, and to ensure the safety of the public. The committee will analyze other states human trafficking laws, as well as federal laws and determine where Michigan's laws stand above and where they fall below. The committee will also review the current proposals and offer guidance and support as needed and requested.

Public Awareness

Members of this committee develop strategies to raise public awareness regarding human trafficking.

There are no new updates for 2023 as the committee was not able to meet due to lack of membership. However, in 2024 this committee will seek to create brochures and cards to provide to agencies, hospitals, law enforcement offices, schools, and other areas. This committee will also work to hold round table meetings with various groups and will attend more public events to bring awareness to human trafficking.

Training and Education

The Training and Education committee reviews existing training efforts and works to determine how those efforts may be enhanced or expanded.

Training and Education in human trafficking must be continuous and relentless. In 2024 the committee looks to ensure more trainings occur in various different arenas, such as health care, schools, and law enforcement. Additionally, the committee will work with other groups to ensure expertise in the subject area and to ensure its impact reaches all parts of Michigan.

Victim Services

The members of Victim Services review the needs of human trafficking survivors to determine how their needs can be met at the local and state levels.

Due to low membership, the work of 2022 was not able to be expanded upon. However, in 2024 the committee will seek to work more actively with the many wonderful advocacy groups that are already working diligently in this space. The

committee will meet with these groups to gain knowledge of their needs and will report that information back to the Funding and Resources Committee and the Policy and Legislation Committee. This groups will also ensure that the Commission is a friend and advocate of the various state and local organizations working in this space and offering assistance wherever possible.

A LOOK INTO THE EVOLVING COMMISSION

Regrettably, the Commission was unable to accomplish all it set out to do in 2023 due to numerous term expirations and resignations. However, the desire and drive to combat human trafficking and support its survivors did not diminish. The Commission is looking to 2024 ready and eager to begin work. The Commission still needs numerous appointments in order to attack the problems presented by human trafficking in Michigan. As membership continues to grow throughout the beginning of 2024, the Commission will work towards accomplishing new goals and ensuring that the Commission is a vital resource for those working in this space. The Commission hopes to improve awareness of human trafficking and its effects in even small communities, to provide assistance in ensuring the laws in Michigan reflect the states zero tolerance of human trafficking and provide support to the survivors of human trafficking.

The committees of the Commission will meet and will reimagine the roles and responsibilities to ensure statutory compliance and community relevance have all been met. The committees will work actively and collectively, making sure that the Commission is recognized as a leader in combating human trafficking.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately the Commission's work in 2023 was stunted due to lack of membership and its goals for 2023 were unrealized. However, the Commission is excited for a new beginning in 2024 and is eagerly awaiting the remaining appointments so that it may take its place as a leader in combating human trafficking in Michigan.