

Michigan Human Trafficking Commission



*2024 Report to the Governor
and Legislature*

COMMISSION MEMBERS 2024

Ms. Melissa Palepu, Commission Chair, Michigan Department of Attorney General

Ms. Katie Papke, Vice-Chair, Life Support Counseling and Coaching

Mr. Michael Draminski, Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs

Mr. Jonathan Walden, Michigan State Police

Ms. Tiffany Martinez, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services,
Division of Victim Services

Mr. Benjamin O'Hearn, Barry County Judicial Referee

Ms. Leslie King, Founder/President of Sacred Beginnings

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

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

Mr. Jeff S. Getting, Kalamazoo County Prosecuting Attorney

Ms. Kimberly Hurst, Founder/CEO Avalon

Dr. Jenny Shih, Associate Division Head – Quality, Trinity Health IHA Medical
Group

Office of Governor (vacant)

Law Enforcement Designee (vacant)



MESSAGE FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Human trafficking continues to plague the most vulnerable in the State of Michigan. By using control and submission, traffickers exploit their victims, subjecting them to sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Human trafficking, which includes labor trafficking, commercial sex trafficking, and debt bondage, remains an issue throughout the State, with no region being immune. In 2023, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reported 779 signals were received from Michigan alone. From those 779 signals, 254 cases were confirmed and 506 victims were identified. Since the creation of the Hotline in 2007, Michigan has received over 10,000 signals, confirmed almost 3,000 cases and identified over 6,200 victims. While these numbers are not complete and likely are at least five times greater, they do confirm the stark reality that human trafficking is happening within our borders and is affecting thousands of Michigan residents directly and even more indirectly.

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 what human trafficking is, what it will really look like, and what our citizens should do when they suspect human trafficking. Education, enhanced survivor and victim protections, and strong criminal laws will be the only way to eradicate human trafficking in Michigan.

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, since the National Human Trafficking Hotline began collecting statistics in 2007, it has received 10,179 signals, or tips, from the State of Michigan. Of those there were 2,956 confirmed cases with 6,287 victims. In 2023 alone, Michigan had 779 signals, with 254 identified cases of human trafficking and 506 victims identified. Michigan routinely ranks amongst the highest States for reports of human trafficking. What is most startling, human trafficking reports are significantly and notoriously underreported. Therefore, with the high numbers Michigan is reporting it is clear that human trafficking continues to plague the State of Michigan. 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

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.

In 2024 the Commission held a total of five meetings. The Commission met on:

Wednesday, March 27, 2024	12:30 PM
Wednesday, May 22, 2024	12:30 PM
Wednesday, July 31, 2024	12:30 PM
Wednesday, November 13, 2024	12:30 PM

These meetings were held at the Michigan Department of Attorney General's Office in Lansing, Michigan and were also held virtually to accommodate more members of the public. Routinely the meetings attracted between forty and sixty members of the public, seeking to engage with others regarding this crucial topic.

The Commission is scheduled to meet six times in 2025, with meetings scheduled on:

Thursday January 23, 2025	12:00 PM to 1:00 PM
Monday March 10, 2025	12:00 PM to 1:00 PM
Monday May 19, 2025	12:00 PM to 1:00 PM
Monday July 14, 2025	12:00 PM to 1:00 PM
Monday September 22, 2025	12:00 PM to 1:00 PM
Monday November 17, 2025	12:00 PM to 1:00 PM

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN MICHIGAN

Human trafficking occurs throughout Michigan. There is no one particular county or town where human trafficking occurs. The impact of human trafficking is felt across the entire State. While human trafficking statistics are flawed and do not provide a full and accurate accounting of the pervasiveness of human trafficking in Michigan, the statistics we do have offer some guidance and some understanding of what is occurring.

The National Human Trafficking Hotline, which collects statistics regarding human trafficking across the United States, annually provides statistics for each State individually. The latest statistics are from 2023 and indicate that only 5 other states received more “signals” or tips regarding suspected trafficking than Michigan received. Additionally, only 7 other states identified more cases of suspected trafficking than Michigan identified in 2023. The National Human Trafficking Hotline reported that Michigan received 779 signals, identified 254 cases, and identified 506 victims.

	Nationwide	Michigan
Signals	30,162	779
Cases	9,619	254
Victims	16,999	506

It is important to remember that these numbers only reflect the suspected trafficking that someone reported. It is widely accepted worldwide that only a very small fraction of human trafficking is actually reported or identified.

Additionally, Shared Hope International, which is an international organization that is also widely respected throughout the anti-trafficking movement. Shared Hope offers “report cards” for each individual state, reflecting on each state’s legislative efforts to eradicate human trafficking. These report cards grade states via letter grades, similar to grade school grading rubrics. In 2023, Michigan received the letter grade of “F”. Shared Hope found that Michigan was extremely lacking in identifying and responding to victims, providing a continuum of care, providing justice to survivors, offering a victim-centered criminal justice response, and preventing trafficking and training individuals about trafficking.



F **MICHIGAN**
2023 Report Card

TIER II









GRADES ARE BASED SOLELY ON AN ANALYSIS OF STATE STATUTES. While we recognize the critical importance of non-legislative responses to propel progress, grading on statutory law provides a clear mechanism for evaluating policy goals across all states while ensuring that survivor-centered reforms are an enduring part of states' responses.

STATE HIGHLIGHTS:

- Between 2021-2023, raised score by 8.5 points.
- Commercially sexually exploited children can be identified as child sex trafficking victims regardless of whether they have or identify a trafficker.
- Requires convicted offenders of child sex or labor trafficking or CSEC offenses to pay restitution to victims.
- Allows child and youth victims of sex or labor trafficking to seek accountability for their offenders through civil processes.

SAFE HARBOR STATUS:

State law fails to prohibit the criminalization of all minors for prostitution offenses, thus allowing 16- and 17-year-old sex trafficking victims to be held criminally accountable for their own victimization.

Issue	Grade	Score	Summary
 1. Criminal Provisions	B	15.5 17.5	Policy goals accomplished related to buyer accountability under state CSEC laws, mistake of age defenses, decoy defenses, business entity liability under the trafficking law, and financial penalties. Gaps remain related to buyer accountability under the trafficking law and trafficker accountability under state CSEC laws.
 2. Identification of and Response to Victims	F	11 27.5	Policy goals accomplished related to third party control and child abuse definitions. Gaps remain related to foreign national victims, screening through child welfare and the juvenile justice system, non-criminalization for prostitution offenses, expanded non-criminalization, juvenile court jurisdiction, and non-caregiver trafficking cases.
 3. Continuum of Care	F	4 15	Gaps remain in all areas, including community-based services, MDT responses, services through child welfare and the juvenile justice system, extended foster care services, and appropriations.
 4. Access to Justice for Trafficking Survivors	D	10 15	Policy goals accomplished related to restitution and civil remedies. Gaps remain related to civil orders of protection, crime victims' compensation, vacatur, and statutes of limitation.
 5. Tools for a Victim-Centered Criminal Justice Response	F	5 10	Gaps remain in all areas, including hearsay exceptions, alternatives to live, in-court testimony, victim-witness supports, and privileged communications.
 6. Prevention and Training	F	6 15	Gaps remain in all areas, including training for child welfare, juvenile justice agencies, law enforcement, prosecutors, and school personnel as well as prevention education in schools.
EXTRA CREDIT	 Youth	1	Protection related to civil remedies is extended to sex trafficked youth.
	 Child Labor Trafficking	3	Protections related to financial penalties, restitution, and civil remedies are extended to child labor trafficking victims.

OVERALL GRADE **F** **55.5**
TIER II

COMMISSION GOALS 2024-2025

When the Commission met in early 2024, it established working Goals for the 2024 and 2025 calendar years. Knowing these goals were ambitious and labor intensive, the Board felt it prudent to have a two-year plan, as opposed to only looking ahead for one calendar year. The Commission spent much of 2024 laying the groundwork for these lofty goals and hopes to realize these goals by the end of 2025.

Extraordinary progress has been made throughout 2024 and the Commission remains committed and motivated to these goals in 2025.

The Commission's 2024-2025 Goals are:

Overall Goals

- To update the Commission website so that becomes a central location for everything related to human trafficking in Michigan. The Commission would like to ensure the website has all the resources and information that individuals and organizations may need to secure resources for survivors, to fight human trafficking, and to educating themselves regarding human trafficking.
- Create a Podcast on Human trafficking.
- Sponsor student journalism with the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.
- Create a Human Trafficking Commission Logo.
- Ensure educational programming and trainings are updated.
- Have representation from every county in the State.

Committee Goals

- *Funding and Resources*
 - Raise \$50,000 for programming, which would include education programming, podcasts, public service announcements, literature, the logo contest, and to pay lived experience experts for assistance.
 - Find grants and available resources for those working in this space and update them on the Commission website.
- *Data Collection and Research*
 - Create a survey to send out to medical facilities, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, and schools to answer the following or more:
 1. What is the extent of human trafficking in Michigan?
 2. What is the extent of awareness of resources?
 3. What is the greatest need in Michigan to prevent human trafficking?
- *Training and Education*

- Create an educational program for school age children.
- Create a Labor Trafficking training for law enforcement.
- Update all of the trainings on the Commission website.
- Ensure that every aspect of training is available on the website.
- *Public Awareness*
 - Create public service announcements about human trafficking.
 - Create literature about human trafficking to hand out to the public.
 - Create a Commission Logo contest.
- *Victim Services*
 - Find all the available services for victims/survivors and update that information on the Commission website.
 - Evaluate where the needs of survivors/victims are not being met and make recommendations on how those needs may be met in the future.
- *Policy and Legislation*
 - Find all relevant laws and rules/regulations regarding human trafficking in the State and Federal and put the information on the Commission website.
 - Evaluate all the relevant laws and regulations and see where improvements can and should be made and then make recommendations.
 - Evaluate where Michigan stands in relation to the other 50 states and even other countries and make recommendations.

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 committees that break down and tackle these numerous areas of work.

The Commission has established the following Committees:

Data Collection and Research
Funding and Resources
Policy and Legislation
Public Awareness
Training and Education, and
Victim Services

Given the significant work that each Committee seeks to perform in 2024-2025, the Commission opened up the Committees to allow for community members to volunteer and assist with realizing the individual Committee Goals. There are currently fifty-five volunteers who actively work on Committees to ensure the Commission continues to be dedicated and impactful throughout the State of Michigan.

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.

This Committee consists of four volunteer members, including two State of Michigan employees who work in related roles within MDHHS, leadership from a private data analytics firm specializing in human trafficking data, and a psychologist who works in victim services and has a background in research and data collection. The Committee is led by the Commission's LARA appointee. The Committee met three times in 2024, focusing primarily on: (1) developing direction, goals, and objectives; (2) reviewing prior goals and previous data projects; (3)

searching and compiling state and national human trafficking data sources; (4) determining what data is currently being collected by national and state agencies; (5) reviewing available data to determine what data is the most important towards stated goals; (6) collaborating with the Human Trafficking Health Advisory Board and other Human Trafficking Commission Committees to avoid duplicate efforts; (7) and strategizing viable research and data collection initiatives that will best support the Commission's mission and goals. The Committee made modest progress in 2024 and will meet on a bimonthly basis in 2025 to continue its progress on these stated objectives towards determining actionable goals that will help in the fight against human trafficking in Michigan.

Funding and Resources

The Funding and Resources Committee is tasked with identifying and applying for grants and other funding sources for the Commission's work. The Committee is comprised of three members, one being the Commission Chair and two being volunteers.

In 2024, this Committee began working towards its goals, which includes raising money to help fund educational programming, training programming, podcasts, public service announcements, and community outreach activities. Specifically, this Committee seeks to create a "tip sheet" for those looking to apply for grants. These tips would help organizations or agencies on best practices for applying for grants, with insights on what has been helpful in the past. Additionally, the Committee is looking to determine what grants or funding sources may be available to the Commission so that the Commission may continue forward with its ambitious goals. To begin this work, the Committee is focusing on finding funding that may be utilized in the creation of educational programming, literature, and public service announcements.

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. Currently there are thirteen members on the Committee, with three Board members and ten volunteers.

In 2024, the Commission actively supported Senate Bills 515, 516, and 517, as well as House Bills 5836, 5837, 5838, 5839, and 5840. The Commission believed (and continues to believe) the proposed legislation was absolutely necessary to ensure successful prosecutions of those victimizing our most vulnerable, while also protecting those who have been victimized. The Commission looks forward to

another active year promoting legislation in 2025 to ensure that the State of Michigan is a leader in combating human trafficking while supporting survivors.

Aside from supporting legislative efforts in Michigan, the Committee also began looking to other states efforts to analyze what legislation has been working for those states in their efforts to combat human trafficking. The Committee hopes to compile this information and provide a comprehensive report at the conclusion of 2025.

Public Awareness

There are nine members in this Committee. Members of this Committee are working towards developing strategies to raise public awareness regarding human trafficking.

The Public Awareness Committee spent 2024 working towards its goals of creating public service announcements, creating literature about human trafficking, and sponsoring a topic at the Michigan Association of Broadcasters Student Journalism Contest. The Student Journalism Contest was a success, with two college entries and approximately two dozen high school submissions. The students were tasked with doing either a video or audio piece discussing human trafficking. The award winners will be announced in late March.

Training and Education

The Training and Education Committee reviews existing training efforts and works to determine how those efforts may be enhanced or expanded. This Committee consists of twelve members, with three Board members and nine volunteers.

Training and education in human trafficking must be continuous and relentless. In 2024 the Committee began discussing the creation of a youth program that could be taught in schools to teach the dangers of human trafficking and social media. The Committee also began working on creating a labor trafficking specific training, as well as worked on ensuring the Commission website had up-to-date trainings for all different professionals. The Committee seeks to ensure that there are trainings available for health professionals, school personnel, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, court personnel, those working in food services/restaurants, and within the hospitality industry. The Committee also began listing seminars and classes that may be available for others to attend. That information has been made available on the Commission website.

Victim Services

There are ten members on the Victim Services Committee, who began reviewing the needs of human trafficking survivors so that the Commission may determine how to best meet their needs at the local and state levels.

Victim Services was very active in 2024 and created a comprehensive online form that will be sent to the many different non-governmental organizations and governmental organizations that work to provide services to victims and survivors of human trafficking. The questionnaire focuses on the needs of survivors and victims' for the first two years after being trafficked. This questionnaire just recently launched on the Commission website and will allow for the Commission to not only provide a list of service providers to the community but will also provide much needed information regarding the amount of financial resources needed to assist survivors in their recovery and reclaiming of their independence, as well as what services are needed the most and in which area of the State do we need to offer more assistance. The Committee is also currently collecting funding sources for victim services that will be posted on the Commission's website. The funding source information will include local, state, and national opportunities.

A LOOK INTO 2025 WITH THE COMMISSION

The Michigan Human Trafficking Commission went from being largely defunct in 2023, to transforming into a thriving and active State Commission in 2024. This transformation was largely due to the ambitions and dedications of the Board and the many amazing volunteers who have been dedicated to eradicating human trafficking in Michigan and supporting survivors of this heinous crime. The Commission spent a considerable amount of time in 2024 rebuilding and rebranding, seeking to engage all communities in the State. It is the hope of the Commission that by the end of 2025, the Commission will have connected to all 83 Counties in this great State.

In the Spring/Summer of 2025 the Commission looks to hold its first Annual Mixer in Lansing, Michigan. The Commission hopes the Mixer will bring together, in-person, the many different professions and persons who work to combat human trafficking, as well as those who have been impacted by human trafficking into one social setting so that everyone can discuss what has been working for them and what has not. This information will then disperse throughout the State. Additionally, the Mixer will create important connections that will allow the work of the Commission to continue to grow and impact the State in its entirety.

The fight to combat human trafficking is a war with many battles but united we can be victorious. Michigan has the opportunity to be a leader in the fight and has the dedicated and talented citizens to be a model for combating human trafficking throughout the United States.

CONCLUSION

The Michigan Human Trafficking Commission leapt into 2024 ready to undertake the serious tasks assigned by statute. The Commission spent 2024 working not only as a Board, but also with the many volunteers who were eager to lend their expertise to ensure Michigan led the fight against human trafficking. The Commission created very important goals to ensure their work remained targeted and focused and the results have been spectacular. The Commission will continue to realize its 2024-2025 goals in the year ahead and hopes in doing so, will engage the State in much need discussions regarding what human trafficking is, who it impacts, and how to stop it from attacking our most vulnerable citizens. The Commission looks forward to the continued support from the Governor's Office and the Legislature as we continue forward, united.