

Preventing Human Trafficking and Protecting Arkansas Children

Executive Summary for Executive Order 23-17 Recommendations

Governor Sanders issued Executive Order 23-17 To Prevent Human Trafficking and to Protect the Children and Youth of Arkansas. The Executive Order tasked the Secretary of the Department of Human Services with presenting recommendations to develop a standardized screening tool, update training and educational materials, revise data and information sharing to better serve victims, and revise state protocols for assisting human trafficking victims.

The Secretary gathered key leaders with expertise or experience around human trafficking from across the state, including law enforcement, state agencies, service providers, advocacy organizations, and federal partners. At the first meeting on June 1st, the Secretary directed this group of experts to develop statewide protocols to ensure a coordinated and effective response to human trafficking.

This group was divided into four workgroups to develop recommendations around four primary categories outlined in the Executive Order: Statewide Identification Tool; Victim Support; Coordinated Response; and Prevention, Education, and Training.

The Statewide Identification Tool workgroup recommends adopting an evidence-based tool to identify victims. This tool would include a three-level approach: a rapid assessment, an in-depth background assessment, and a comprehensive assessment for interviewing victims.

The Victim Support workgroup and the Coordinated Response workgroup collaborated to recommend The Arkansas Human Trafficking Protocols, a series of processes and best practice to address human trafficking statewide. Specifically, they recommended the formulation of a Human Trafficking Coordinated Response Hub—aimed at centralizing support services, empowering local law enforcement, and protecting victims.

Lastly, the Prevention, Education, and Training workgroup compiled a recommended list of local, state, and national human trafficking educational resources to support students, parents, counselors, and school personnel. They also recommended ongoing training for key Arkansas professionals involved with human trafficking.

Recommendation 1: Statewide Identification Tool

The state of Arkansas should implement a standardized assessment tool to identify human trafficking victims. The workgroup identified three validated, evidence-based tools, already in use nationwide, and recommends the adoption of one of these existing tools.

There were three tools identified that met the criteria outlined below. The workgroup determined that additional input was needed to decide which one best meets the state's needs.

Identification is the first step in helping victims escape human trafficking. The use of an evidence-based tool will help professionals identify victims in a more timely and effective manner. A three-level tool would equip professionals who interact with different types of victims. To ensure proper administration and ensure trauma-informed care for victims, those who conduct these assessments should have proper training.

Statewide implementation strategies should also be considered, including data collection, information accessibility, and costs. Ideally, the identification tool would be housed with one state agency to allow statewide access by all relevant professionals. Locating the tool within a single state agency will also mitigate duplication, reduce costs, and streamline access to data necessary to properly serve victims, including evaluation of the tool's effectiveness and improvement of service provision to victims.

Level 1 — Rapid Assessment

The first level would be a rapid assessment with eight or fewer questions designed to quickly identify potential victims and provide immediate assistance. This could be used by law enforcement, first responders, guidance counselors, and essential frontline individuals who have brief encounters or sporadic interactions with potential victims.

Level 2 — Background Assessment

The second level would be used to assess a situation by analyzing history and background information. This would consist of an assessment completed by a reporting individual based on their knowledge of the victim's background and behavior. A background assessment would identify any red flags that may indicate trafficking without interviewing a possible victim.

Level 3 — Comprehensive Assessment

Level three would be the most comprehensive assessment designed to directly interact with the potential victim, allowing them to disclose in a private, safe, confidential manner.

To ensure that level two and three assessments are conducted properly and provide adequate trauma-informed care for victims, professionals who administer these assessments must undergo adequate training and fully understand the tool. These professionals are typically individuals with anti-trafficking backgrounds who interact with human trafficking victims regularly.

Recommendation 2: Arkansas' Human Trafficking Protocols

Arkansas lacks a singular point of contact to coordinate human trafficking responses among law enforcement, child protection services, service providers, and advocacy organizations. Human trafficking reporting and investigations vary across geographic regions in the state. In addition, they differ depending upon the entity responding to the report.

The workgroup recommends the state formalize human trafficking protocols to address the problem in a more efficient, effective, and uniform manner. These protocols would also expand resource availability, increase offender prosecution rates, improve victim support services, and enhance protections for victims.

A centralized Human Trafficking Coordinated Response Hub, (the "Hub"), is needed to provide a focal contact point for adults and minors named in human trafficking allegations. The Hub would also engage with local agencies to provide technical assistance to law enforcement. This Hub will ensure that reports are made to the necessary hotlines such as the Child Abuse Hotline and The Polaris Project (National Human Trafficking Hotline). The Hub's priority is to engage with the appropriate local law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities; provide data and contact information to federal agencies, child protection agencies (including the Department of Human Services), the Arkansas State Police Crimes Against Children Division, service providers, and victim advocacy groups. The Hub should have an advisory committee consisting of leadership from law enforcement, child protection, service providers, and victim and advocacy agencies that provide policy, practice guidance, and oversight.

A trafficking experience, as well as the trauma that results from trafficking, creates barriers to connecting with and receiving support. Victims often lack meaningful family relationships and community connections. Moreover, many victims may come from a family system of abuse and neglect. As such, victims need a vast array of resources and sustained assistance.

Arkansas' Human Trafficking Protocols:

1. The Hub:
 - a. Initial communication is received by the intake coordinator/screener/intelligence specialist at the Hub. Initial information indicating trafficking and victimization could come from law enforcement investigations, the Polaris Project (National Human Trafficking Hotline), NCMEC, ICAC cyber tips, or advocates. Other service providers would be directed to the Hub intake to organize the local or area response.
 - b. Immediately upon report receipt, the intake coordinator will determine whether the victim is a minor or adult. By statutory necessity, the response

will differ for a contact concerning a minor victim.

- For minor victims, the coordinator will:
 - Confirm that a report was made to the Child Abuse Hotline and CACD has been assigned.
 - Notify an established geographical lead agency, such as a prosecutor or multidisciplinary team facilitator.
 - Notify the local, county, and State law enforcement entities and connect the appropriate law enforcement with lead CACD investigator and supervisor. Deconfliction protocol will determine which agencies investigate.
 - Notify the established geographical victim and advocacy services for the age range of the victim, providing them with the geographic area as well as known service needs.
- For adult victims, the coordinator will:
 - Notify an established geographical lead agency, such as a prosecutor.
 - Notify the local, county, and State law enforcement entities for the reported geographic location. Deconfliction protocol will determine which agencies investigate.
 - Notify established geographical victim services of the potential need for response, providing them with the geographic area and known service needs.
- The Hub will provide technical assistance to law enforcement and the local teams.
 - Forty-eight hours after the initial contact with the coordinator, a follow-up status inquiry will be conducted. The coordinator will ensure that the local team has the necessary contacts and information for a criminal investigation as well as regional service and advocacy agencies. In addition, the coordinator will encourage the local team to provide an update to the prosecuting attorney. The prosecuting attorney should make recommendations as to the notification and involvement of federal agencies. State hotlines and investigative agencies should coordinate with national reporting hotlines to avoid duplicative reporting.
 - Ten days after the initial contact, the coordinator will complete a status report, indicating all steps taken,

including custody and placement status, provision of victim services, status of investigation and/or arrest(s), and the pertinent subsequent updates. This report will be sent to the supervisors of all entities involved.

- Sixty days after the initial contact, the coordinator will organize a status check with all agencies involved.

2. Investigation Activity and Strategy:

a. Investigative agencies will begin their investigation, including any statutorily required actions by the agencies. Timing and coordination with all involved agencies of the victim and witness interviews, such as interviews of additional victims, should be carefully considered if the trafficker has not been arrested.

- For minors:
 - Prior to the initiation of the investigation, local law enforcement (LLE) and CACD should coordinate and complete history searches. This should include child welfare history (e.g., CHRIS search).
 - CACD is required to contact the victim within twenty-four hours after a report is accepted by the Child Abuse Hotline. CACD should coordinate with LLE to schedule the first contact with the victim. LLE will serve as lead on criminal investigation, and CACD and the Division of Children and Families (DCFS) will work alongside LLE to ensure the child's safety.
 - Coordination between CACD, DCFS, and LLE to conduct interviews is essential to ensure that victims are not interviewed multiple times.

b. Within seventy-two hours of notification or as soon as practically possible, the agencies and entities involved in the report, including the appropriate prosecuting authorities, will meet, virtually or in-person, to develop a continued action plan that includes investigation, child protection, and victim services. LLE, with support of the Hub or the local multidisciplinary team, will lead in organizing the communication.

3. Victim Services:

a. Treatment

- Medical: Medical care should be provided to victims, including a specific standard of care that includes free options for initial

assessment and ongoing care related to victimization.

- Mental Health: Expansion of evidence-based treatment practices and improved coordination with multidisciplinary providers is needed.
- Substance Abuse: Substance abuse services should be developed for adult and minor trafficking victims, including acute and residential treatment services.

b. Placement and Housing:

- Placement should take into consideration those in need of inpatient treatment for psychiatric and/or substance abuse and those who do not require these services.
- For those requiring a higher level of care, an inpatient continuum of care should be developed, including acute hospitalization, psychiatric residential placement, and inpatient substance abuse treatment. Partnering providers should develop programs for all levels of care.
- Alternatives such as specialized foster placements and independent living placements, with life skill coaching where necessary, should be available for those not requiring inpatient psychiatric care. Specialized temporary (drop-in) shelters should also be established.
- Following placement, an in-home needs assessment should be performed.

c. Advocacy and Coordination:

- Development of partnerships between existing multidisciplinary teams in child advocacy centers and other systems with community service providers will be needed to increase collaboration and decrease duplicative effort.
- Due to the complex nature of human trafficking victimization, provision for legal services is recommended.
- When a child victim of trafficking has been identified, a child makes an outcry of trafficking, or an assessment has been conducted that identifies a possible victim of trafficking, the HUB should contact the child sex trafficking advocacy organization serving the identified geographic region.
- Child trafficking advocates, CAC's, CACD, DCFS are responsible for crisis response, crisis intervention, crisis management, and long-term care management. Advocacy services provided should be in support of needs of law enforcement/first responders, prosecutors and service providers with prior relationships with victims.
- Services for adult victims should be provided by victim service providers designated within a geographical area.

d. Safe at Home Program:

- 47 States offer Safe at Home programs to protect victim confidentiality. It is recommended that Arkansas develop a Safe at Home program for statewide operation.

The workgroup recommends that the collection of data is critical for the appropriate evaluation of the protocols. All entities involved in the investigation, prosecution, child protection, and services provided should submit information to the Hub, including but not limited to:

- Victim demographics
- Whether a child was placed in foster care
- Services rendered, if applicable, and the rendering provider(s)
- Whether an arrest was made, and if so, the name(s) of the accused and the arrestable offense(s)
- Disposition of criminal prosecution

The workgroup also recommends the Hub generate a yearly report that shall be distributed to key stakeholders and government officials across the state. The report should include the number of reports received, relevant responses, and outcomes.

Recommendation 3: Prevention, Education, and Training

The Human Trafficking Prevention, Education, and Training workgroup compiled a list of updated local, state, and national resources for human trafficking training and educational materials (see attached). This list is designed to provide training and educational resources for students, parents, counselors, and school personnel. This will supplement materials promoted by the Arkansas Center for School Safety of the Criminal Justice Institute as required by the LEARNS Act.

In addition, the workgroup members discussed the importance of collaborating with other professionals and supporting training opportunities to ensure the state has an integrated approach to support victims, prosecute criminals, and address human trafficking. While many of these fields may use the educational resources outlined on the attached list, the Human Trafficking Prevention, Education, and Training workgroup also recommends establishing education and training leads for key sectors involved in combatting human trafficking. These leads would be responsible for identifying and monitoring consistent introductory trainings for their respective constituents as well as ongoing continuing education opportunities. Key sectors include but are not limited to:

- Child welfare
- Judges

- Medical providers, particularly in the pediatric field
- Mental health professionals
- Multidisciplinary Team members
- Prosecutors
- Public defenders
- State, county, and city law enforcement agencies

In addition, individuals who regularly engage with Arkansas' Human Trafficking Protocols should undergo routine training and be notified of any updates or changes to the Protocols.