Human Trafficking News Digest: April 15, 2014
Compiled by the Center for Public Policy Studies

Jamestown Sun

U.S. Senators Research Sex Trafficking in Mexico (April 15): U.S. Sens. Heidi Heitkamp and Amy Klobuchar are spending part of Congress’ recess in Mexico, hoping to bring back ideas on how to crack down on sex trafficking. Across the U.S., an estimated 100,000 children are forced into sex trafficking every year. Mexico, Heitkamp said, is one country “we’re deeply concerned about” – not just as an origin of sex trafficking but as a thoroughfare for other victims shuttled to the United States from Central America and South America. During their trip, Heitkamp (D-N.D.) and Klobuchar (D-Minn.) will meet with the attorney general of Mexico, Mexico’s undersecretary for North America and many local organizations to learn “how we can work more collaboratively to protect victims of human trafficking and sex crimes,” Heitkamp said. The pair is traveling with Cindy McCain, a vocal advocate of taking on human trafficking and the wife of John McCain, Arizona senator and former presidential candidate. Both senators arrived in Mexico on Monday and will return to the U.S. Wednesday. The trip is being paid for by the U.S. Department of State.

Abc 6 Providence

Bill to Up Penalties for Sex Trafficking Unanimously Passes the House (April 15): A bill that would keep people convicted of sex trafficking behind bars longer unanimously passed the Rhode Island House of Representatives on Thursday. Representative Doreen Costa proposed the legislation saying the state needs to take steps to strengthen its human trafficking laws. Costa’s bill increases the prison sentence for sex traffickers to 35 years from the current 20 years and ups the fines for the crime from $20,000 to $40,000. “Rhode Island criminalized human trafficking in 2009. That is just five short years ago. Think about that! Together we have taken the next step to stand up for the victims of sex trafficking in our state by strengthening our laws,” said Costa. Costa said that she hopes by bringing this crime to the forefront it may also inspire people to volunteer and help victims. “Consider the nightmare of being taken against your will by a sex predator, to be forced into that dark, scary world with no where to turn. We have many voices in our state who speak out for victims but they don’t always get the support or the headlines that they deserve for their heart wrenching work.” The bill must now be approved by the Senate, then signed by the governor.

Smyrna-Clayton Sun-Times

Bill to Fight Human Trafficking Introduced in Delaware (April 14): A new legislation aimed at fighting human trafficking has been recently introduced in the Delaware General Assembly. Senate Bill 197 will expand criminal penalties to cover people on the ‘demand side’ of human trafficking and also gives law enforcement important new tools to protect the victims, says attorney general Biden. “Many of us don’t realize how frequently people of all ages fall victim to human trafficking right here in the United States, including Delaware, or understand the lasting and damaging impact that it has on individuals and their families,” Sen. Blevins said. “Not only does this
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bill strengthen our ability to penalize those who carry out these crimes, but it provides protections for victims, so that they are not criminalized for acts which they were forced to commit. Also, through the Council established under this bill, Delaware will continue to coordinate and develop rehabilitative services to help victims cope mentally and physically after their abuse, and get them back on their feet.”

Portsmouth Herald

States Working to Toughen Laws Against Sex Trafficking (April 13): In the small town of Sydney, Maine, population 4,200, a father and son were arrested Thursday on charges of sex trafficking for running a brothel out of their home with half a dozen women. That same day, two people in Litchfield, Maine, population 3,600, were arrested on the same charges for conducting a similar operation at their mobile home. Just two weeks earlier, three Gorham, Maine, men were arrested on sex trafficking charges for arranging for a 19-year-old woman to engage in sex acts with strangers for money. “People think of this as a big-city problem, and it’s not. They don’t realize this happens next door to you, and survivors are people who may look just like you,” said professor Erin Corcoran of the University of New Hampshire School of Law. Ten years ago, almost no states were dealing with the issue of human sex trafficking — defined as a situation in which one or more people coerce another person to engage in a sexual act against her or his wishes. Today, only two states lack a sex trafficking statute, she said, although the Polaris Project also tracks whether states have instituted related measures like law enforcement training, asset forfeiture, labor trafficking, victim assistance, access to civil damages and vacating convictions for sex trafficking victims. Vanderhoof said the Polaris Project ranking, the only one of its kind for states, is intended to nudge them to take a look at this issue. In 2013, based on 2012 data, Maine scored a 5 out of 10, while New Hampshire scored a 3 — making it one of the worst states in the nation in terms of providing protection to victims of sex trafficking. But officials in both states anticipate that will change completely when next year’s rankings come out.

Major legislation has been enacted or is on the verge of enactment in both state legislatures this session, and Maine passed a comprehensive bill in its Legislature’s previous session as well. In New Hampshire, Senate Bill 317 creates “a huge sea change in how victims are looked at,” Corcoran said. It makes prostituting minors a felony, provides protection from criminal prosecution or juvenile delinquency proceedings to minors who have been trafficked, makes it a felony to force a person to engage in sex or labor acts against her or his will, and allows victims to sue their trafficker for damages. The bill has made it through the Senate and the House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee will hold a hearing on it Tuesday, April 15. If it makes it to the desk of Gov. Maggie Hassan, she is likely to sign it. The Maine Legislature has passed two major pieces of legislation — one last year and one just signed into law by Gov. Paul LePage on Thursday. The 2013 law expands the definition of human trafficking to criminalize the victimization of another individual for profit. The law also renames “promotion of prostitution” to “aggravated sex trafficking” and “sex trafficking,” depending on the circumstances of the offense. It also toughens penalties for multiple violations. Maine Rep. Amy Volk, R-Scarborough, took another step in this legislative session. Her bill, signed into law last week, makes sex trafficking a defense to the charge of prostitution, which could result in a lack of criminal conviction for the prostitute.
Los Angeles Times

County Officials, State Lawmakers Launch Anti-Sex Trafficking Push (April 11): Elected officials in Los Angeles County and the California Legislature are launching a new push to crack down on pimps who sell underage girls and boys for sex and the customers who purchase their services. County officials announced Friday that signs would go up around the region over the next few months -- on public buses and trains and at rail stations and bus stops, as well as on 20 billboards donated by Clear Channel Outdoor -- bearing messages like, “Teens sold for sex aren’t prostitutes. They’re rape victims.” The county board of supervisors also voted unanimously Tuesday to back four bills in the Legislature dubbed the War on Child Sex Trafficking package. The sponsors of two of those bills, state Sens. Bob Huff (R-Diamond Bar) and Ted Lieu (D-Torrance), appeared alongside Supervisor Don Knabe to announce the campaign Friday. The bills include SB 982, which would make it a felony rather than a misdemeanor to solicit a minor for sex; SB 1388, which would increase the fines levied against pimps and johns and direct the money to a fund for trafficking victims; SB 955, which would allow investigators to seek wiretaps against suspected human traffickers; and SB 473, which would add human trafficking to the list of offenses that can be used to establish that criminal defendants are involved in gang activities, leading to potentially longer sentences. At Tuesday’s supervisors meeting, some youth advocates spoke against the legislation, saying the solution wasn’t tougher criminal penalties but more resources for victims and youth who might be vulnerable to the sex trade.

KXAN

Human Trafficking an Increasing Problem in Fayette County in Texas (April 11): Authorities in Fayette County say they are encountering human traffickers on a regular basis and their deputies have been involved in three pursuits in the last three weeks involving ‘Coyotes.’ “Coyotes do not have any regard for property or human life,” a statement from the Fayette County Sheriff’s Office said. They add the individuals are only concerned with delivering the people they are transporting to an assigned location, so they can collect payment. Police say the most recent incident occurred Thursday at about 2 a.m., when an officer on patrol came across a suspicious truck driving slowly down a country road. As the deputy attempted to stop the truck, the driver sped away and a chase ensued. The truck plowed through a gate and onto private property before crashing into a ravine. Three people inside the truck were located at the crash site and taken away by EMS crews. Three others were found several hours later. The truck had been reported stolen in Houston, police said. Sheriff’s officers in Guadalupe County said the truck had fled from officers there about an hour before the Fayette County deputy attempted to pull the vehicle over.
Naples Daily News

Controversial Clause Removed from Child Sex Trafficking Bill in State House (April 10): A contentious measure that would have allowed children affected by sex trafficking to be housed involuntarily was stripped Thursday from legislation that now should easily become law. The bill, sponsored by Gayle Harrell, R-Port St. Lucie, included language creating a “secure safe house” pilot program housed in the Department of Children and Families. It would house children who have been sexually exploited, but are flight risks and will not consent to less-intensive treatment. In past committee stops, several advocate groups said the measure was unconstitutional, because a child could be held against their will for up to 10 months. Harrell, who said she believes the pilot program is constitutional, didn’t want the provision to hurt the rest of the bill, but stressed she thought it was good policy. The bill, SB 7141, overhauls the assessment system for determining if an exploited child should spend time in a safe house. Among other things, factors would need to include the risk of the child recruiting other children into sex trafficking, the level of the victim’s attachment to the abuser and the level of trauma the child has endured.

Reuters

Pope Says ‘Enough’ to Human Trafficking, Calls it Crime Against Humanity (April 10): Pope Francis said “enough” to human trafficking on Thursday, denouncing it as a crime against humanity as police leaders and religious groups from around the world pledged to work together to combat it. Francis addressed the final session of a two-day Vatican-sponsored international conference on human trafficking attended by top law enforcement officials, politicians and representatives of religions. Participants included British interior minister Theresa May, Interpol Secretary-General Ronald Noble, London Metropolitan Police chief Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, and anti-trafficking activists from around the world, many of them nuns. According to a report last October by the Walk Free Foundation charity, nearly 30 million people live in slavery across the globe, many of them men, women and children trafficked by gangs for sex work and unskilled labor. According to a report last October by the Walk Free Foundation charity, nearly 30 million people live in slavery across the globe, many of them men, women and children trafficked by gangs for sex work and unskilled labor. He said it was important for leaders like the pope to make appeals against human trafficking and brand it a crime against humanity because such denunciations can bring concrete results.

USA Today

Five Arrested in FBI Sex Trafficking Sting in Augusta (April 9): An undercover sting operation targeting prostitution and child sex trafficking netted five arrests in Augusta over the weekend. The FBI says the illegal activity is the target of a special task force made up of local and federal agencies. The Child Exploitation Task Force is in town because of the Masters. The FBI said big events like the Masters and the NCAA Final Four bring a lot of
people to town, but they also bring an increase in illegal activity in the sex trade. “People come to these events to have a good time,” Special Agent Stephen Emmett said. “And some people’s definition of a good time differs from what the law’s idea of a good time is.” The FBI said the suspects picked the wrong week to allegedly ply their trade in Augusta. They say they see increased activity in child exploitation and sex trafficking during big sporting events. Last April the Final Four was held in Atlanta. A similar task force called “Operation Intentional Foul” netted four arrests on pimping charges, but more importantly seven underage girls who were being pimped, were rescued.

**Omaha World Herald**

*Iowa House Gives Final Approval to Human Trafficking Bill* (April 9): The Iowa House has granted final approval to a bill meant to crack down on prostitution and pimping involving minors. The House unanimously voted Tuesday to pass the bill and send it to Gov. Terry Branstad. The final version includes language from the original legislation drafted in the House and Senate. It would remove the offense from the records of anyone previously convicted of prostitution as a minor and would increase the penalty for pimping involving a minor. It also would establish an additional fine for offenders that would go toward a fund for victims.

**KTAR**

*Human Trafficking Bill Gets Nod in Arizona Senate* (April 9): The Arizona Senate has given initial approval to a bill targeting pimps who traffic minors for sex. House Bill 2454 was championed by the wife of U.S. Sen. John McCain and by Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer. The House passed it on Feb. 27. The bill toughens penalties for trafficking adults and targets businesses such as massage parlors and escort services that advertise online. It requires advertisers to post their license number and have written permission of any women they depict and evidence they’re not minors. Cindy McCain says the bill would put Arizona at the forefront of the fight against human trafficking by imposing harsh penalties for pimps. The Senate gave initial approval to the bill on Wednesday. A full roll-call vote is still needed before it goes to Brewer.

**US Department of Defense**

*DOD to Issue Regulations Aimed at Preventing Human Trafficking* (April 8): The Defense Department continues to train its workforce to identify human trafficking and plans to issue new acquisition rules to contractors aimed at preventing all forms of forced labor, acting Deputy Defense Secretary Christine H. Fox said today. Fox made the comments while attending a White House meeting of the President’s Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, a Cabinet-level group created to coordinate federal efforts to crack down on sex trafficking, forced labor and other types of human exploitation. As part of the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, the Pentagon is required to take action against any contractor engaging in certain activities.
related to sex or labor trafficking. Fox told the session the department is working with a sense of urgency on the matter, and will be publishing new acquisition regulations this year governing contractors with respect to human trafficking, and will be training department employees on how to implement the rules. Fox said the effort to identify and prevent human trafficking extends to U.S. commanders around the world. “We are injecting human trafficking scenarios into exercises that are run globally through our combatant commanders,” she said. The Obama administration estimates that as many as 29 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking.

U-T San Diego

**DAs Support Anti-Human Trafficking Bill** (April 7): District attorneys from four counties, including San Diego, announced their support of a bill that seeks to streamline human trafficking prosecutions, thereby reducing some of the trauma to victims who testify in court and saving taxpayer dollars. The measure, Senate Bill 939, would enable prosecutors to file multiple charges in one jurisdiction for human trafficking-related crimes committed across the state. District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis said at a Monday morning news conference that human trafficking is the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world, and is now ranked second only to drug trafficking in California. If passed, the bill would amend the penal code to create a consolidated trial process for human trafficking and related offenses, including pimping and pandering. Similar laws are already in place to prosecute serial rapists and child molesters. The bill, authored by Sen. Marty Block, D-San Diego, would save expenses in California’s chronically underfunded courts and spare victims from having to testify in multiple trials in more than one county, each time having to relive the crimes they endured. Another human trafficking bill is in the Assembly now would allow gang allegations to be filed in human trafficking in cases when appropriate.

Wall Street Journal

**Pimp Gets 10 Years Under NJ Human Trafficking Law** (April 7): A man who pleaded guilty to running a high-priced prostitution ring has been sentenced to 10 years in prison in one of the first cases brought under New Jersey’s new human trafficking law. Percival Williams of Edison was sentenced Monday under a law that took effect in July 2013. He won’t be eligible for parole for at least five years. The 36-year-old Edison resident pleaded guilty Feb. 10 to conspiracy to commit human trafficking and promoting prostitution. “Williams lured vulnerable young women with promises of a glamorous life, only to trap them in a hell of prostitution, beatings and fear,” said acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman. Prosecutors said he kept the women at his house or in nearby hotels, and solicited clients for them by placing ads on the website Backpage.com or sending the women to solicit clients at hotels in Manhattan, Atlantic City and Las Vegas. He would beat the women and threaten their family members if the women didn’t earn enough, prosecutors said, forcing them to charge high hourly rates for sex acts, typically $500 to $1,000, and then turn all proceeds over to him.
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Chicago Tribune

Feds, Strip Clubs Fighting Human Trafficking (April 5): The pairing of federal agents with an industry that has drawn a fair share of negative attention for everything from alleged links to organized crime to negative effects on neighborhoods strikes some as surprising. But those working at the clubs say their jobs put them as close to the problem as anyone. They have seen troubling signs of trafficking — scared women who seem under the control of the men who pick them up — and want to know what to do. The training is part of a 3-year-old partnership between federal agents and the strip club industry that started after St. Louis-based club operator Michael Ocello found one of his clubs the target of a human trafficking investigation. At the most recent training, agents highlighted the signs of trafficking, including a dancer who doesn’t carry her own ID or passport or someone constantly short of cash, because her trafficker is keeping most of it. Physical abuse or reluctance to make friends or to be social is another concern. Agents also urged club employees to pay attention to who picks the dancers up after work. Sex trafficking links to strip clubs have turned up in federal investigations nationally, including a major case tried in Chicago federal court in 1999 in which several Latvian women were forced to work as dancers here. Two years ago in Detroit, federal charges were brought against seven people who forced women to dance at clubs there. Agents said U.S. citizens have been forced into trafficking as well through coercive measures. Some experts who have studied the sex trade question the effort. Gail Dines, a sociology and women’s studies professor at Wheelock College in Boston, was skeptical about law enforcement working with an industry with direct links to the exploitation of women, including prostitution. Dines said she suspected what was really happening was an effort by a long-criticized industry to cozy up to law enforcement. Bernadette Barton, a women’s studies professor at Morehead State University who researched the strip club industry for her 2006 book “Stripped: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers,” wondered how inclined dancers would be to draw law enforcement’s attention to a club, given other crimes that might be occurring there and the potential for retaliation.

7 KTVB.com

Boise Police Battling Human Trafficking by Changing Perceptions (April 4): Judges, prosecutors and detectives say there’s a crime in Boise that’s a much bigger problem than people realize, prostitution. But, they’re trying to battle it in a new way, by changing how they view it. More people are aware of the growing problem of prostitution in Boise, with high-profile court cases and community awareness meetings. But Boise Police Detective Mike Miraglia says in order to battle it, police have to change their response to it. First, he says, they need to call it what it is. “What we recognize as human trafficking these days, we used to call prostitution.” Prostitution used to be considered a nuisance crime. Miraglia says it can’t be that way anymore. “Generally, women and children, as young as 12 or 13, are enticed into human trafficking, and then, they are sold as commodities by individuals who could care less about them personally. So, instead of treating and prosecuting prostitutes as criminals, Miraglia says police are treating them as who they truly are, victims. This approach is especially key in getting victims to come forward, which is rare. But detectives say it’s the best way of finding human traffickers, since they do their deals online and are only in town a few days. Miraglia says a lot of victims are brought in to Boise, but some
locals are coerced or forced into this life. Miraglia says human trafficking is a community problem. He says we have to reduce the demand for prostitution. That can be done by raising awareness about the level of the criminal enterprise those who are soliciting prostitution are contributing to, that they are victimizing women and children in their own community.

**Capital Public Radio**

*California Bill Would Classify Human Trafficking as Gang Crime* (April 3): State law enforcement officials say gangs have become more involved in human trafficking because people can be repeatedly sold for profit, unlike drugs and guns. “Essentially it’s the use of human beings as objects and treating them as expendable commodities,” says Ellyn Bell is with the Sage Project, an anti-trafficking group. “That’s whether it’s for labor or sex and that’s highly disturbing.” The legislature is considering a range of human trafficking bills from one that adds it to the serious felonies list, to another that would allow multiple human trafficking charges to be tried in one jurisdiction. State law allows crimes to be classified as “gang activities” when law enforcement is able to show a pattern of organization. Sentences for gang-related crimes are usually stiffer. The measure now awaits an Assembly floor vote.