Human Trafficking News Digest: March 31, 2014
Compiled by the Center for Public Policy Studies

The Courier

Anti-Human Trafficking Measure Moves Forward (March 31): Victims of human trafficking may see more state services made available to them, if legislation that would allow for intervention through the court system passes. A report by Shared Hope International found that Louisiana has one of the higher rates of human trafficking. House Bill 569, sponsored by Rep. Julie Stokes, R-Kenner, which gained approval from the House Judiciary Committee last week and will be heard on the House floor, would allow district courts to create a division for human trafficking cases. Traditionally, the state has looked at victims of human trafficking as prostitutes. Over the past few years, Louisiana lawmakers have tried to change that perception. Stokes’ bill is a part of a package that would strengthen penalties for captors, provide more money for victim support services and allow courts to intervene and to secure counseling and shelter. Stokes’ bill would require judges to be trained to accommodate victims and versed in available services. But courts would not automatically consider every defendant legally guiltless of any crime. The judge would determine if the defendant was a victim and require that she comply with support services to see the case dismissed. The bill uses the word “may” instead of “shall,” so it would allow district courts to create a special division, but the division will not be mandatory. Because the division is optional, state finance officials could not predict how much the legislation would cost the state if enacted.

WZZM13.com

Human Trafficking Is Prevalent in Western Michigan (March 29): It’s not just a problem in foreign countries, experts say human trafficking is happening right here in West Michigan. It was the topic of discussion today at the “Women At Risk” conference in Holland. Lawmakers are now considering legislation to help fight human trafficking. State Sen. Judy Emmons, (R) Montcalm County says, “I think the number that was mentioned today was that 2,400 individuals are available at any one time in West Michigan for trafficking. Our goal is to go after perpetrators, individuals who are buying, selling and make us the strictest state against trafficking.” Human trafficking is the fastest growing branch of organized crime. Michigan ranks 13th in the United States for the number of victims in the state.

11alive.com

Atlanta Airport Unveils Sex Trafficking Signs (March 28): Its called a Human Trafficking Notice and the question is simple: “Are you or someone you know being sold for sex or made/forced to work for little or no pay, and cannot leave?” Airport spokesman Reese McCranie said there’s a reason the signs are all positioned at about four feet off the ground. “They’re at eye level for a child to actually see the print and the 1-800 number to call and get help if they think they are a victim of trafficking,” said McCranie. The airport is partnering with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation following a recent report that Atlanta has the biggest cash-based underground sex economy in the nation. The Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center reported street and online prostitution, brothels and massage
parlors are bringing in $290 million a year. In addition to the signs, airport employees are getting trained on how to spot possible sex trafficking.

**CBS St. Louis**

**Drug Dealers Switching to Human Trafficking** (March 28): Human trafficking is on the rise, and St. Louis County Police think they know why. Sgt. Adam Kavanaugh of the special investigations unit says a lot of drug dealers are switching to human trafficking. "It's a lot easier, and the product doesn't go away," he says. “Once you sell your product, if it's drugs, it's gone. You have to re-up that all the time. If you have a girl, you can use her over and over, night after night.” He says the average pimp is making somewhere around $250,000. The police also releasing new details on who the victims of human trafficking are. Kavanaugh says they come from near and far. “A lot of the girls who are coming here into St. Louis County, victimwise, are coming from small towns like Troy, Lincoln County, Warrenton, Joplin, and Springfield, and they’re all coming up here because out there they can’t make as much money.”

**CUNY School of Law**

**U.N. Condemns Criminalization of Trafficking Victims as a Human Rights Violation** (March 27): The U.N. Human Rights Committee urged that the U.S. end the prosecution of human trafficking victims for crimes that they are forced to commit. The Committee expressed concern that victims of sex trafficking are arrested and convicted for prostitution and related offenses, and recognized that there is insufficient identification of trafficking victims. The Committee urged the U.S. to “take all appropriate measures to prevent the criminalization of victims of sex trafficking, including child victims, to the extent that they have been compelled to engage in unlawful activities. The recommendations follow the Committee’s dialogue with a U.S. government delegation in Geneva earlier this month to review the U.S.’s compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, one of three human rights treaties to which the U.S. is a party. Advocates from the International Women’s Human Rights Clinic and The Legal Aid Society’s Trafficking Victims Advocacy Project were in Geneva during the review to raise the issue of criminalization of victims of sex trafficking with U.S. government representatives and the Committee. IWHR, TVAP, and the Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center also submitted a shadow report to the Committee highlighting the issue as a human rights violation. Sixteen states across the U.S. have enacted legislation designed to mitigate these harms by allowing survivors of human trafficking to clear prostitution and related convictions from their records.
CBS Miami

Lawmakers Search for Compromise on Sex-Trafficking Bill (March 27): A Florida House panel spent months on a sweeping measure that would ensure services for sex-trafficking victims, but the bill is stalled in the Senate over one issue — a proposal to detain some victims for months to keep them from returning to their pimps. The Senate Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee is expected to take up the sex-trafficking issue Tuesday. The House Healthy Families Subcommittee developed a proposal (PCB HF 14-02) that would provide sexually exploited children with specially-trained child protective investigators and case managers, as well as medical care and safe places to live. It would also direct the Department of Children and Families to develop services for victims in areas where none exist and to inspect and certify what are known as “safe houses.” But victims often run away from the safe houses, and some recruit others to lives of prostitution — which led the House Healthy Families Subcommittee to include the bill’s most controversial provision, a pilot program for up to 15 of the most traumatized sex-trafficking victims in a “secure safe house” in which they could be placed involuntarily for up to 10 months. Advocates have argued throughout the bill’s progress that locking up victims would interfere with their recovery. “Striking a balance between supporting a girl as a survivor of a crime and treating her with respect and an appropriate level of autonomy is critical to helping her recover,” noted a position paper released Monday by the PACE Center for Girls. “The appropriate policy goal is not to create ‘safe houses’ but to provide a system of care with high quality comprehensive services and support suited to the needs of each survivor.”

USA Today

Sex-Trafficking Cases Hard to Crack in Wisconsin (March 26): In November, The (Appleton, Wis.) Post-Crescent found that while 40% of women arrested for sex work faced criminal charges, 99% of men arrested for patronizing prostitutes were released unscathed. In line with the report, Appleton and Grand Chute, Wis., police and county prosecutors said they were adjusting policies to take a harder stance on johns, while offering more options for women potentially trapped in the world of sex trafficking. The Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance reports that trafficking has been documented in more than half of all Wisconsin counties, in both rural and urban areas. To date, more than 200 victims have been identified. Since 2000, about one in six victims reported in Wisconsin was a minor. “I don't know if we're seeing more reports of trafficking because it's happening more or just that we're more aware of it,” said Marathon County Deputy District Attorney Theresa Wetzsteon, who prosecutes the bulk of sex crimes in the county. “I just know it's happening more than we can even handle.” Few suspects accused in prostitution-related crimes have been charged with felony trafficking — in part because alternate charges are easier to prosecute, Wetzsteon said. Proving trafficking is difficult because state law puts the burden on victims, who have to prove the trafficking was done without their consent.
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The Times-Picayune

Louisiana’s Human Trafficking Reports Increased in 2013, Study Says (March 25): Reported incidents of human trafficking in Louisiana nearly doubled in the first half of 2013 compared to the previous year, according to a recent report on trafficking that focused particularly in the New Orleans metro area. In the first six months of 2013, a hotline run by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center received roughly 227 calls from Louisiana, 50 of which were likely human and sex trafficking cases, the report said. That’s a dramatic upsurge from 2012, when the hotline received 223 calls from Louisiana in the entire calendar year, 40 of which were likely cases. The report calls New Orleans a “significant source, transit and destination location for human trafficking,” citing its location and seemingly constant need for temporary workers as primary reasons. The 40-page report was the result of a collaborative effort between the Modern Slavery Research Project at Loyola University and the New Orleans Human Trafficking Working Group, and was spearheaded by Loyola professor Laura Murphy. It provided a glimpse into the underworld of human trafficking, defined by coercion into sex or labor by force or under the threat of violence. Of the 50 likely human trafficking cases called in to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center in the first six months of 2013, 68 percent involved sex trafficking, including pimp-controlled situations, internet-based commercial sex and escort services, the report said. The research also found that one of every four male clients and a third of female clients at Covenant House of New Orleans, an emergency shelter program for teens and young adults, have at one point traded sex for money or shelter. After Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans in 2005, thousands of temporary guest workers flooded the city, eager for construction jobs. According to a study conducted by the Human Rights Center of the University of California at Berkeley, 54 percent of those workers were undocumented, setting the stage for human trafficking abuses that can occur when workers are in the United States on work or guest visas, Murphy wrote.

Arizona Public Media

Brewer Creates Human Trafficking Council (March 25): Gov. Jan Brewer established a human trafficking council, which will continue to explore ways to reduce trafficking in Arizona, said a press release from the governor’s office. The Arizona Human Trafficking Council aims to develop a comprehensive and coordinated victims’ plan, evaluate and report human trafficking statewide data to the governor, and promote greater collaboration with state law enforcement and agencies, the press release said. The council will build upon research done by the Task Force on Human Trafficking, the press release explained. The task force was created in 2013, and since then has interviewed issue experts to come up with recommendations to deal with trafficking in the state - from creating tougher trafficking laws to increasing protection for victims. Brewer has also been working with state lawmakers to strengthen already established state trafficking laws. Human trafficking was one of Brewer’s key priorities for her last term, as highlighted in her 2014 State of the State address earlier in the year, the press release said.
Reno Gazette – Journal

Women, Girls Held Hostage on Streets of Reno (March 22): An increasing number of the young women who walk Fourth Street in Reno looking for customers — local men and visitors to the city’s major events — began working as prostitutes while in their teens. They are manipulated by men who control every aspect of their lives, said Reno Police Sgt. Ron Chalmers, one of the leaders of an effort to to stop sex trafficking in Northern Nevada. A steady increase of sex trafficking in Northern Nevada has sparked an effort by local, state and federal agencies to try to save the exploited girls and prosecute their pimps. Many of those involved in the problem are seeing a shift in the way these cases are handled, and hope changes in the law will help stop the victimization of the girls. A bill passed by the Nevada Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Brian Sandoval in June toughened penalties for pimps and created new opportunities for the treatment of victims. The next step will be a change in the public’s perception of the crime as well as the prostitute’s perception of herself and her predicament, experts say. Sex trafficking — the act of forcing a woman into prostitution — is on the rise in the Reno area. The exploitation happens every day in hotels, casinos and in the front seats of cars — called “car dates.” Some victims have reported that their pimps moved from selling drugs to selling humans because the punishment was less significant. Since 2002, the FBI and local law enforcement agencies have “rescued” about 100 children identified as possible victims of juvenile sex trafficking in Northern Nevada, Higginbotham said. That number does not include the adult women being trafficked, which experts say would be impossible to produce because many women don’t acknowledge that they are under the control of a pimp. The Nevada Legislature during the 2013 session passed a measure (Assembly Bill 67) The new law, which went into effect on July 1, made trafficking an adult a category B felony that carries a three-to-10-year sentence. Exploitation of a child is now a category A felony that carries a maximum life sentence. Parole eligibility for those cases depends on how young the victim is. that redefined the crime of pandering. It made human trafficking a serious offense that carries tougher penalties.

Hawaii Reporter

Police Can’t Use Penetration to Investigate Prostitution, Under Proposed Hawaii Legislation (March 21): Under Hawaii law, police officers may engage in sexual penetration during investigations into prostitution. Senate Judiciary and Labor Chair Clayton Hee and his committee members are backing a request by sex trafficking advocates to put a stop to the practice through new legislation that also aims to strengthen Hawaii’s anti trafficking laws. Kathryn Xian, head of Pacific Alliance to Stop Slavery, and a Democratic congressional candidate for district 1, helped to draft House Bill 1926 Relating to Crime, which will be amended by the Senate by next Friday to prevent the practice. Xian said the legislation, should it pass the full Senate and House and be approved by the Governor, will help protect victims of sex trafficking from police misconduct. Both federal and state law enforcement here acknowledge Hawaii has a serious sex trafficking problem.