

## House Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence

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AUSTIN (6/3/10, E1.030, 10:00 AM)

The House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence, under the direction of Chairman Gallego, and the House Committee on Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence, under the direction of Chairman Hunter, met today in the Capitol Extension for invited testimony on its joint interim charge of human trafficking.

Joint Interim Charge: Study the human and sex trafficking problem in Texas. Make recommendations on best practices in the areas of investigation, prosecution, and tracking of the victims of these crimes. Study whether victims of these crimes are allowed to adequately recover from their attackers in a civil cause of action.

The joint committee convened at 10:09 a.m. Chairman Hunter, Chairman Gallego, Rep. Madden, and Rep. Pierson made opening remarks.

(10:15) Bexar County District Attorney Susan Reed discussed the sexual exploitation aspects of trafficking and her experiences with it in Bexar County. She said there are more sexual exploitation cases than originally anticipated, and those cases are juvenile females involved in prostitution, drugs and organized crime. She recommended removing the statute of limitations for sexual exploitation of children or, at least, making the statute of limitations 10 years after their 18th birthday. She recommended more education of police to recognize the victims of trafficking. She told Rep. Branch her recommendations were not "too broad." She and the members discussed domestic and international trafficking, the causes and processes of sexual exploitation, other legal impediments to prosecution, aging-out, and federal coordination.

(10:43) David Boatright, chief of the Criminal Investigations Division at the Office of the Attorney General, discussed the Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force and its 4 workgroups: law enforcement, training and outreach, victim services, and legal review. He spoke of the Human Trafficking Reporting System (HTRS). He and the members discussed the number of arrests, length of sentences, and the adult users of child prostitutes.

(11:05) Captain Rick Cruz from the Houston office of the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission (TABC) discussed local cases and efforts to combat sex trafficking and "licensed locations"/bars. He spoke of the coordination and information sharing necessary to address trafficking. He recommended more law enforcement training, public education and outreach. Responding to Rep. Kent, he said more resources and manpower are needed to identify the "many, many more" licensed establishments where trafficking is occurring.

(11:23) Lieutenant Thon Overstreet of the Dallas Police Department's Vice Unit and a member of the Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force discussed the multi-state, multinational and multi-agency raid on a trafficking organization which happened today. He stated law enforcement "partnerships" are crucial, and current law enforcement technology is "15 to 20 years behind" the technology used by traffickers. He discussed the Fusion Center, technology, and seizures with the members.

(11:46) Detective Sergeant Ruben Fuentes of the Austin Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit discussed the rise in trafficking and police efforts to deal with it. He said current law enforcement technology is "way behind" to address the internet solicitations, etc.

(11:54) Billy Sifuentes, a liaison and trainer for the Austin Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit, spoke of his years of law enforcement experience with trafficking. He spoke of training postal carriers, apartment managers, and medical professionals to recognize trafficking.

(12:16) Chris Burchell of the Texas Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Child Sexual Exploitation Coalition and the members discussed political leadership, lack of resources, inadequate victim services, difficulties dealing with juvenile custody, due process, aiding and abetting, civil statutes regarding pimps/caretakers, public education, and transporting charges.

(12:45) Mandi Kimball, director of public policy and government affairs for Children-at-Risk, recommended the state align its law with the federal statutes on trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. She asked for funding for safe harbor initiatives to keep the victims out of the juvenile justice system. Regarding treatment of young victims, she recommended utilizing social services rather the criminal justice system. Since juveniles cannot consent to sex, underage victims should not be made into criminals by being forced to consent to sex for money.

(1:00) Chairman Gallego and the members discussed expansion of felonies and educating the public about sexual exploitation.

The House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence and the House Committee on Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence adjourned at 1:14 p.m.